

AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN BENGAL 1765-92

DISSERTATION

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IN
HISTORY

By

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Under the supervision of

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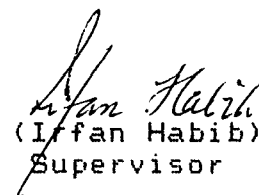
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This to certify that Mrs SHAMITA SARKAR, has engaged in full-time study for the period prescribed in the Ordinances (Academic) and has put in regular attendance in accordance with rules laid down by the Academic Council, in pursuit of work for the M.Phil degree in History and that she is eligible to submit her M.Phil dissertation on "Agrarian Relations in Bengal, 1765-92", which has been duly seen and approved by me as her Supervisor.


(Irfan Habib)
Supervisor

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AGRARIAN RELATIONS IN
BENGAL: 1765 - 1792

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PREFACE

In the eighteenth century Bengal was the first major region to feel the brunt of colonial intrusion. For this important reason alone the agrarian history of Bengal has remained a subject of continuing interest.

To add to this large scholarly literature needs some justification. The Permanent Settlement has dominated the debate and the period 1765-90 has been seen mainly as a prelude to it. In other words, one has tended to analyse the successive revenue arrangements with the Permanent Settlement as the concluding measure. what this dissertation tries to do is to alter the initial point. I have tried to see how the agrarian society of Bengal was reshaped and altered under the fiscal pressure exerted by the East India Company during this period. It might illumine some aspects relevant to the Permanent Settlement this would be only incidental to my purpose.

The first chapter of the dissertation, delineates the power position and rights of the *zamindars* as these came from the *Nizamat* times.

The second chapter is concerned with the actual producers, the peasants

The third chapter deals with the crucial cogs in the revenue realization machinery, the service gentry. There is much evidence regarding the involvement of *zamindars* in the bureaucracy of the *Nizamat*. During the colonial period, the service - gentry acquired a new dimension, by their intricate knowledge of the local set-up.

The fourth chapter deals with the great Bengal Famine of 1769-70 and its consequences for the agrarian Society. The demographic dislocation and its spatial impact has been particularly investigated.

In the fifth chapter we have studied the post- famine agrarian conditions Basically our treatment is woven around the problem of exacting revenue rigorously from the desolated country. The impact of the enhancement and rigidity in collection on the old landed aristocracy, and the gradual waning out of their position and status: its reflection on the old patron- client relation, the rise of the new service gentry who acted as collaborators and confidants of the colonial officials, the opening of a nascent market in land rights forged by auction sale of the defaulting estates are all dealt in this chapter.

Chapter six deals with the coming of the Permanent Settlement. Here we have surveyed the actual rural set up on the eve of the settlement, the impact of the revenue experiments of the Company on the collection and the controversies among the Company's officials regarding the status of the land right in India. Our analysis suggests that maximization and stabilization of the income from land was the primary motive behind the settlement. We have put this in the perspective of the turbulent atmosphere prevailing in the agrarian society where each occupational

group from the *zamindar* to the tiller were trying to adjust to the changes imposed by the colonial state.

The study thus fits into the ongoing debate on the actual impact of colonialism in eighteenth century India. The investigation suggests that to see the eighteenth century as a continuation of the old order is not justified at all.

The validity of the "revisionist" postulate, that the colonial government was a weak structure that managed to position itself at the top ruling rung of the polity with neither the potency nor the penetrability^{to} change the indigeneous patterns of socio economic growth, has been offered a serious scrutiny.

Up to date research on the agrarian history of eighteenth century Bengal, pioneered by N.K.Sinha and his students had concentrated on the English language materials. While the official texts of the revenue regulations and relevant letters of the English officials are of course relevant, an attempt is here made to use Persian and Bengal language sources, the records of the *zamindari* estates, sale deeds etc, which are mostly unpublished. More stress is also laid on the local records lodged in the District Collectorate record rooms, which till now had been only sporadically used. The important new documents used in this study are Persian sanads and parwanas regarding pre- Permanent Settlement land sale, and *Teriz Rakba* documents in Bengali of the Mahishadal *zamindari*, lodged in West Bengal State Archives; the Mughal Parwanas to qanungoes of Kutchbehar and Kamrup lodged in National Archive New Delhi; the private papers of the several *zamindari* of Birbhum and

documents from ^Taidav Math and other Bengali manuscripts from Viswabharati collections, *Taidad* and land grant papers of the Nadia *zamindars* lodged in Krishnanagar Collectorate Record Room Nadia, and the documents in the series called *Haqiqat-i- Mahallat -i- Subah- Bangala*. (IOR Mss, Photocopy) lodged in Research Library CAS, History Aligarh Muslim University. A detailed list of the sources is available in the bibliography. I can however, claim for my efforts only the status of a preliminary exploration.

SHAMITA SARKAR

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It is a pleasure to acknowledge the helps I have received during this work. My greatest debt is to my supervisor Professor Irfan Habib. It is a rare opportunity to work with him, and I can never thank him enough .

My father, Dr.Chandi Prasad Sarkar, motivated me to study history as a discipline. His constant encouragements and support needs to be remembered with gratitude.

Professor Barun De first suggested me to work on this theme and always took keen concern about the progress of my work. I have always been immensely benefited from his advices and thank him for his kindness. Professor Benoy Choudhry, taught me economic history of Bengal during my post graduate years in the Calcutta University. Being his student enabled me to have the basic ground for pursuing research in this field. He had always been keen to share the upto date literature on the subject and discuss in detail about the progress of my work. I am really grateful to him.

Prof.Shireen Moosvi was the first to suggest I should join the Centre of Advanced Study in History as a research scholar. I sincerely acknowledge her kindness and

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Prof.I.H.Siddiqi, Chairman of one department and Prof.Iqtidar Alam, former Chairman and Dean of the faculty have always supported my research endeavours.I am deeply grateful to them.

My interactions with Prof.S.P.Gupta helped me to understand the various dimensions of writing regional history and I earnestly thank him.

I also acknowledge my debt of gratitude for Prof.Syed Tariq Hasan who taught me Persian, and Mr.Habibullah the Persian instructor in the department.

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I also earnestly thank the staffs of the various libraries,archives and record. rooms where I worked for my research, for their generous help. My special thanks are due to Prof.Sukhomoy Mukhopadhyaya and Prof.Amitrasudan Bhattacharya,head of the department of Bengali, Viswabharati for allowing access to unclassified manuscripts and documents.

Mrs. Roma Ghosh and Mr. Salil Ghosh, IAS and Mr. Sukomol Sen (former member of the Parliament) had offered me a home out of home during my brief sojourn in archives and libraries of New Delhi. Prof.Mrs Santosh Nath and Dr.Kailash Nath offered their hospitality when I first came to Aligarh. I thank them all.

Fellowship offered by the Indian Council of Historical Research and the University Grant Commission, enabled me to complete the work without any material constraint.

I also acknowledge the helps of my friends Syed Hussain Haider and Manavendra Pundhir for helping me in proof reading and preparing the bibliography. Sanjay had been very much accomodating all these years, and also computer-processed the manuscript in spite of his own busy schedule. It would be rather too formal to thank him. Anindya, Munshi, Bijay and Prodyut have also helped me in typing the manuscript. I thank them all.

Though much kindness came on my way, the work may yet suffer from several short comings. I shall alone remain responsible for such limitations.

SHAMITA SARKAR

ABBREVIATIONS

<i>Addl. Mss.</i>	Additional Manuscript
<i>B. M.</i>	British Museum
<i>BOR</i>	Board of Revenue
<i>BORP</i>	Board of Revenue Proceedings
<i>B. Y.</i>	Bengali Year
<i>CCRM</i>	Comptrolling Council of Revenue at Murshidabad
<i>COC</i>	Committee of Circuit
<i>COD</i>	Court of Directors
<i>GGC</i>	Governor General in Council
<i>HMS</i>	Home Miscellaneous Series
<i>IOR</i>	India Office Records
<i>Lt. dt.</i>	Letter dated
<i>Misc.</i>	Miscellaneous
<i>Progs.</i>	Proceedings
<i>S.C.</i>	Select Committee
<i>Sec. Consul.</i>	Secret Consultations
<i>SNS</i>	Surul Nathi Sangraha
<i>Op. Cit</i>	<i>Opus Cited</i>

Chapter 1

THE ZAMINDARS

The institution of *zamindari* occupied a central position in the agrarian structure of Bengal, when the British obtained the Dewani in 1765. The *zamindar's* position was dual one: as a sharer in the land tax collected by him on behalf of the government, and as appropriator of a set of rights to cesses, perquisites and produce of forest, tanks, rivers etc. The existence of *zamindar* thus depended upon the manner in which they could ensure undisrupted availability of a sizeable portion of the peasants' surplus which they controlled by their intermediate position in agrarian society. Smoothness of the collection mechanism ensured little interference by the state in the internal microcosm of the *zamindari*.

During the period of *Nizamat* the revenue administration was based on the development of professional expertise confined to select families from whom subordinate administrative officers were recruited¹. Though not pursued vigorously as state policy, for all practical purposes this practice ensured the allegiance of selected

¹R. B. Ramsbotham, *Studies in the land revenue History of Bengal* P. 2

families. These revenue officers had by their intricate knowledge of the local taxation resources, evolved themselves as local elites in the rural agrarian society. Many of them became *zamindars* or were originally *zamindars*. This development far from being typical of the *Nizamat* period, probably dates back to the high mughal days². Some of them might also have obtained *zamindaris* by mughal grants (*sanads*)³. But their power and position seem to have been accentuated during the troubled days of the *Nizamat*.

About the time of the assumption of the *dewani* by the English East India Company there is general evidence of the involvement of *zamindars* in the revenue bureaucracy from the highest. (*Naib Dewan* of Dacca, Rajballav who held the *zamindari* of Rajnagar) to the lowest level (*viz* smaller *mufussil Qanungoes* etc.).

While the ranks of *zamindars* and bureaucrats were thus extremely intermixed, there was a set of large *zamindars* who were formally subject to *peshkash* or tribute, such as the *Rajas* of Vishnupur, Cooch behar and Susang⁴. They were designated *zamindars* but in essence were semiautonomous chiefs.

The *zamindars* held their position normally by a *sanad*, issued by the imperial

²Bharat Chandra Annada Mangal kabya P. 31

³*Ibid.* For example, the case of Nadia Raj. The founder of the *zamindari* Bhabanand Majumdar (Mazumdar a revenue service gentry) obtained the *zamindari* as *inam* for supplying Raja Mansingh garrison for the military during the mughal conquest of Bengal.

⁴Irfan Habib *Agrarian system of Mughal India* P. 184 The difference between ordinary and *peshkash zamindars* was not only about their military power and territorial hold but customs prescribed different principles of succession.

power or his agency, authorising the collection of revenue of scheduled areas, a specified portion of which he claimed as his remuneration. Generally the *sanad* conveyed no right of transference or inheritance⁵. But for all virtual effects it was a hereditary affair⁶. The usual practice however was to get the *sanad* issued in the son's name. The custom as evidenced in the *Rayrayan*'s answers to the Committee of Revenue, was that a daughter had a claim over the *zamindari* of a deceased father, if there is no son. This claim precedes the claims of her father's brothers and nephews⁷.

The traditional *zamindari* right did not imply a unilinear right over land as an artifact of private property. It was a hierarchy of superior rights over the produce of soil as is evidenced by their claims other than their share of the revenue collected. If the *zamindar* performed the customer duties attached to his rights it was practically impossible to dislodge him. In trying to make the new *dewan* i.e. the company) understand what exactly were the rights incorporated in the ubiquitous category of revenue intermediaries called the *zamindar*: Muhammad Reza Khan as their deputy, sought to clarify the issue⁸. According to the Muhammad Reza Khan *sanadi* (i.e. *sanad*- holder) *zamindars* can get their *zamindari* through different methods.

1. The *zamindar* and his dependants brought jungle lands into the cultivation

⁵W. W. Hunter *Bengal Manuscript Records* Vol 1, P. 30

⁶Opinion of *Rayrayan* to the Committee of revenue, BOP dt 27th April 1773.

⁷*Ibid*

⁸BOP Extract from the Miscellaneous Progs. Vol 1 pp 337- 38 translated enclosure date not mentioned.

after which he pays rent to the Government. (These *zamindars* called *jungle-bari zamindars* were numerous in the lower deltaic tracts of the southern Bengal. From the high Mughal days as an intensive to bring vergin land under cultivation these *zamindars* were assesses lightly and irregularities such as deferred claim for a proper title were generally treated leniently).

2. It might happen that the king or the ruling magistrate turns out a *zamindar* either for defalcation or for recalcitrant (*Kalantaran*) nature gives *sanad* to another *zamindar*. Then the later is entitled to the rights and perequisites of the former title, or any thing which is specified in the *sanad*.
3. If a *zamindar* died without any heir, some person could make representation to the king through the ruling magistrate and obtain *sanad* for that *zamindar* for the time till proper heir arrives.
4. If a *zamindar* arbitrarily usurped the possession of other small *zamindars* and afterwards applied to the King or magistrate for a *sanad* in exchange of *nazrana*.
5. If a *zamindar* died without an heir, the king kept the *zamindari* in *khas* but later grants it to some after receiving a *nazrana*⁹.

It thus appears that the position of the *zamindar* partly depended on his relations with his superiors; the later on their part had to consider the *zamindars*' social

⁹*Ibid.* The state and its agencies accepted a bribe to legitimize a non- legitimate claim.

standing and consequent hold over the local community. Under these circumstances, the *zamindars* were even allowed magisterial power which ensured the states' ability to enlarge collection.

The power and position of the *zamindars* were thus strongly entrenched in the rural agrarian society on the double basis of title based upon *sanad* and customs¹⁰. The emoluments that were equated with the right of *zamindari* were very lucrative.

During the imperial Mughal days, the remuneration of the *zamindari* as *mal-guzari* or revenue collectors in Bengal came essentially out of the difference between the actual collection and the amount he has to pay the state¹¹. Besides this legal claim, there were also other claims made by the *zamindar* on the appropriated surplus. In Dacca the share of the *zamindar* as a percentage of assessed land revenue was nominally ten percent in 1774¹². In Chittagong the *zamindars* claims were categorized into *khoraakee* (subsistence) and *dastoor* (custom) which was computed as follows:¹³:

1. On a *jama* of more than hundred rupees the *khoraakee* was 20% of the *jama*.
2. On a *jama* of more than hundred rupees to the limit of five hundred rupees, the *khoraakee* was 15% of the *jama*.

¹⁰Ramsbotham *op. cit.* P. 3

¹¹Habib *op. cit.* P. 145.

¹²PCR Dacca Progs. dt 9th Dec. 1774.

¹³*Ibid*

3. On a *jama* of more than five hundred rupees the *khorahee* was 10% of the *jama*.

The claims of *dastoor* are not given in figures. perhaps it varies greatly.

The other perquisites and claims of the *zamindar* included certain special categories as well. For example *nankar* (lit. to make the bread i.e. subsistence allowance). It was tax free lands allowed to each *zamindar* in lieu of his service in collection of land revenue. This tended to become permanent (*altamgha*) tax-free grants enjoyed hereditarily. Documentary evidence for this can be cited Midnapur and Jellaspore¹⁴. It was also natural that the *zamindar* felt free to augment his income by raising rents in the village offered to him as *nankar*. In most cases there were no exact evaluation, since the original grant (i.e. of the *zamindar*) preceded the revenue roll ascribed to Todar Mall¹⁵.

In addition to *nankar* the *zamindars* were also allowed *bankar* and *jalkar* within their territory¹⁶. Under *bankar* (tax on forest) jungle and waste were let out in farms to person who cut grass, reed, brushwood, for fodder thatching and fuel. *Jalkar* (tax on water) was the revenue from tanks and fishing which in the bigger *zamindari* of Dacca ranged from rupees five hundred to rupees five hundred sixty annually¹⁷.

Over and above *nankar* there were lands held in *nijjo te* (personally cultivated) and *khamar* (farm) by the *zamindars* for their private maintenance, on which (it

¹⁴Records of the Salt district. Midnapur Collectorate, letter dated 28th April 1781

¹⁵Progs. PCR Burdwan Vol. 1 dt. 26 May 1774.

¹⁶Bengali *Hukunama* of Md. Zaman Khan *Raja* of Birbhum.

¹⁷J. Taylor, *A sketch of the topography and statistics of Dacca* P. 152.

appears) no revenue was levied till the time of Decennial settlement of 1789 by the company¹⁸. In the *khamar*, ryots were under engagements of receiving a share of the crop (*sanja*) according to the sort of land they cultivated¹⁹. The share which the *zamindar* got from his *khamar* was not trifling sum as exemplified in the case of the *zamindari* of Baksh Ali (Buxally in English Documents) in Dacca where out of total measured area of 67,968 bighas the *khamar* assigned was 2,446 bighas. Similarly in the *zamindari* of Manohar Gazi which paid revenue on 33,705 bighas, as many as 1,211 bighas of land was kept as *khamar*²⁰.

The Dinajpur *zamindari* derived from its *khamar* approximately Rs. 30,000 per annum, Vansittart found that this amount is smaller than what most of the big *zamindars* enjoyed from this source²¹. In eastern Bengal these lands were also known alternatively as *khannabadi* (literaly food and shelter).

¹⁸Progs. CCRM Appendix to Vol. 1 P. 32 and Appendix to Vol. 2 P. 170.

¹⁹Progs. PCR, Burdwan dt 22 June 1776.

²⁰Progs. PCR, Dacca Vol. XIV dt 28th Feb. 1777.

²¹Progs. CCRM Vol. 2 P. 144, Vansittart to Council dt 16th Oct. 1770. Irfan Habib *op. cit.* pp 141- 143, opined that these lands correspond to *khud khast* holdings and *zamindars* claim on the surplus tended to be higher than other types of land.

The amount of land enjoyed by the *zamindars* under this head in Chakla Jahangirnagar around 1772 was²².

Name of the <i>Pergannah</i>	<i>khamar</i> and <i>khanabadi</i> Lands	<i>Nankar</i>
Jellaulpur	1003 Bighas	12589 Bighas
Rajnapar	4200 Bighas	4158 Bighas
Buzraġ Gomedpur	-	2195 Bighas
Chandradurip	2492 Bighas	1694 Bighas
Edelpur	-	3285 Bighas

For the *nijjote* land also, the valuation was according to the hypothetical *hust-o- bud* of 1582 and even the Company, otherwise meticulous in finding avenues of enhancing collection, let them off with no interference till 1772²³.

In the *khamar* lands, there were no fixed rules about the division of the produce between the *zamindar* and the tiller²⁴. In the absence of a vigorous administration virgin or waste lands when brought under the plough were concealed as far as possible from the notice of the government, as *nijjote* land²⁵. Sometimes these tracts continued to be shown as waste land though actually cultivated. The evidence of this phenomena can be found from the actual *cutcheri* documents of the *zamindari* of Mahisadal *peġunnah*²⁶. Land concealed were shown in the *zamindari* documents

²²Progs. Committee of Circuit Dacca IOR Range 70 Vol. 15 P. 292 *Bazı zamin account of Jellaulpur, Chackla Jahangirnagar for the Bengal year 1178.*

²³Progs. CCRM Vol VII (30 March- 28 Aug 1772) Appendix f. 165.

²⁴PCR Burdwan Vol XI Prog. dt 29 Dec. 1775.

²⁵Progs. CCRM Vol 1 and 98. Letter received from Alex Higginson dt 8. 10. 1770.

²⁶*Teriz Rukba* documents of the *zamindari* of Rani Janaki W.B.SA Bengali Records Bundle.

Mahisadal *zamindari* papers folio 88a.

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Enquiries by the supervisor Alexander Higginson revealed that in Birbhum there were villages, *chauks* and *mahals* which were never brought to account in the *cutchery books*²⁷. The quantity of land was unknown:

Place <i>Pergunnah/Toppa</i>	Number of Villages	<i>Chauks</i>	<i>Mahal</i>	Rs.	Rents Anna	Ganda
Shah Alampur	1	1	1	3564	1	14
Sen Bhoom	4	3	-	802	1	7
Gurnee	4	1	-	273	6	8
Bercondah	2	1	-	166	4	3
Jennyjjol	1	1	-	193	15	18
Nuneyr	1	3	-	421	7	-
Echabirshi	1	-	-	54	7	3
Mullarpur	2	2	1	671	2	10
Collunga	1	-	-	8	17	
Total	18	11	2	6154	15	

Also there were grounds which apparently waste but for which the *zamindar* receives rents amounting Rs. 6,391 As 8 a²⁸.

Besides these direct claims, there were different varieties of indirect claims tolls and cess which can be classified under the umbrella terms *abwab* and *mathaot*. These claims showed variation from region to region.

In Murshidabad²⁹ for example, *mathaot* was not considered a separate collection upon the ryot; each revenue paying unit had an established *assal jama* besides the due *abwab*. *Mathaot* was thus included in *abwab*. In *Dinajpur* however *mathaot* was levied as an additional tax completely distinct from the revenue demand for the

²⁷Letters received dt 8th Oct. 1770 Supervisor Higginson to CCRM O. C. folio 98.

²⁸*Ibid.*

²⁹CCRM Vol 1 Progs. dt 16th May 1771.

private advantage of the *zamindar*³⁰.

It would be wrong to assume that since the *abwab* were part of the exactions of *Nizamat* which were likely to grease the hand of the revenue officer of Murshidabad, the *zamindar* received no share at all from these *abwabs*. Some exactions like *rasm-e-nizamat* (commission of the head peon of the *cutcharry* on revenue brought from mufassil); *rusm-e-khazana* (commission of the treasury officers) were for the mutasuddi and other petty officials of *khaka cutcharry*. But other exactions like *baki khelat* (ceremony at the beginning of the each revenue year) or *Punia* (from sanskrit *Punyaha*= sacred day), *poosthbandi* or *poolbandi* (for repairing bridges and embankments) and *rusm-e-dahanna* (charge for allowing the boats to pass, persian *dahana* meaning confluence of river) were classed under the term *mathaot*, and *zamindars* used to get a fixed share for these. For example out of Rs. 54,352 which was to be acquired from *baki khelat* and *Punia* Rs. 13,425 or 24.7% was earmarked for 12 important *zamindaris* in 1771.

Over and above this there were *zamindari abwab* which the *zamindars* extorted locally. In Chittagong there was the *mamuly mangam*. *Mangam* or *mangan* means alms. But actually it was a compulsory cess levied on occasions of marriages, births and funerals in *zamindari* household, conspicuous expenditures necessary to maintain the social status of *zamindars*. A glaring example was *mangam* levied by the *Zamindar* of Cossijora (Midnapur) for his pilgrimmage to Puri in 1770, (when famine had already stricken) at the rate of 5 annas per bigha in the first year, 8 annas per

³⁰Com. of circuit Dinajpur Progs. dt 20th Dec. 1772.

bigha in second year and 1 sicca in the third³¹.

In Midnapur there was also the *halbhaguni* (tax on plough) levied on the tillers in proportion to the *zamindars*' own wants, especially at a time of payment of revenue instalments. It was reported that the *zamindars* were so severe that ryots took recourse to flight³².

With the warning that a fresh survey would be made and the rent could be enhanced if the demand of the a new cess was not complied with, the *Mookarjee jarib* was commonly claimed in Rangpur. In 1769 Rs. 2,5036 15 annas was paid out of a total revenue of Rs. 12,37,376 14 annas by the cultivators of Rangpur to avoid a fresh *hastobud*³³.

Beside these, the *zamindar* used to impose diferent sorts of cesses on the local marts (*hauts*) held within their area of,operation. *Rahandian* was a rent on the use of the ground for putting shops of the *modec* (~~grocer~~) within the limits of the *haut* *chappah mihal* was a duty to be paid by the venders of coarse and yarn for the mark (chappah) of setting right. Without which the purchaser cannot take away their commodities. *Than bazar* and *meen mahal* were duties paid by the venders of fish, vegetables, fruits, milk etc. brought for sale in the *hauts*, whether sold or not. *Dhooliet* was a duty paid by the venders of rice and grains brought to be sold by the whole sale on if being deposited at a rate proportionate to the estimated value

³¹Firminger (ed) *Midnapur Dist. Records* Vol. 1 P. 34.

³²*Ibid.*

³³Com. of circuit, Rangpur Prg. dt 29th Nov. 1772

thereof. *Bihu* was imposed on the same articles when sold by retail but payable after the commodity was sold off. *Coyallee* was the tax paid by weighman for the exclusive privilege of weighing and measuring the things sold in the *haut* for which they received trifling fees from both buyers and sellers. *Apasee* was the tax paid by the owners of bullocks that bring foods for sale to the *haut*. It was calculated at a certain fixed sum on each bullock on an yearly basis. *Nakhas mahal* was a duty collected on the sale of horses, elephants or cattles at the local mart. The *faujdar* of the region used to get a share from this tax to allow the transaction³⁴. Even for articles which were sold not in the premises of the *haut* proper, but outside mostly by the marginal vendors a cess called *Beerbundy* was imposed on them. If this was the picture in the *zamindaris* under the Hooghly division it is likely that *zamindars* else where in Bengal were also levying similar dues on the markets.

Besides there were taxes like marriage fees which could be equated with feudal exactions. In Rangpur the amount collected under this head was Rs. 2123, annas 7, ganda 7, pai 3 from seventeen pargunas under the *zamindars'* jurisdiction.

³⁴A description of such cases are listed in: Revenue Governor General in Council, Progs. Vol. 205 (19th- 28th May 1790) Appendix PP 46ff.

Baze adaye or extortions were part of the livelihood of the *zamindar*. This is exemplified in the report of the supervisor of Jessore about the collections of Srikant the *zamindar* of Eusufpur from the *raiyats*³⁵.

Head	Rs.	As.	G	P.
Shyamroo (<i>Krishna Britti</i>) <i>Thakur</i>	934	-	5	-
Sadbrata or Good deeds	6844	7	3	-
<i>Britti</i> of Radha (deity)	111	11	10	1
<i>Nittya Puja</i> (daily worship)	808	7	18	-
<i>Lobdea purah</i>	63	12	-	-
<i>obeas Naphur</i>	470	3	13	3
<i>Dooreahbad</i>	6338	1	-	-
<i>Maal Connaljering</i>	10,481	14	-	3
<i>Britti</i> of Jaggernaulli	2,326	13711	-	-
<i>Batta</i> of 300 14 gonda on every rupee as per practice	6,491	1	1	-
	35,002	-	1	-

Thus the social standing of the *zamindar* which was maintained through conspicuous consumption was actually depended upon the exaction from the *raiyat*.

The *zamindars*' entrenched position in the rural society can best be seen in their relationship with their immediate sub-ordinate the '*talooqdars*'. In Bengal the term meant a sub- *zamindar*³⁶. In the *Amini Report* of 1774³⁷, the persons who held land subject to the payment of revenue were classified into two categories. The *zamindars* and *choudhuri* belonged to the first while the *talooqdar* and *raiyat* were together placed in the second category. The position of the *talooqdar* was thus

³⁵Letter received from the Supervisor of Jessore dt. 28 Nov. 1770 to the CCRM, O.C 30th Nov. 1770.

³⁶*op. cit* P. 144.

³⁷Ramsbotham, *op. cit* P. 103.

inferior to the rank of *zamindar*. The *Amini* Report states that,

“ In order to bring wastelands into cultivation, in consideration of a sum of money, the performance of particular services or to provide for a relation or dependents *zamindars* were induced to parcel out portion of their districts to *talooqdars*, subject to their authority, who engage to collect and pay an annual revenue. But the relative state in which a *zamindar* and his *vassal* were thus placed, gave rise to circumstances which made it the interest of the one to endeavour to dispossess his *tenant* and of the other to free himself from dependence on his superior”³⁸.

This passage very aptly describes the relationship between the *zamindar* and his *talooqdar*. The *talooqdar* thus dealt with the *raiyat* on behalf of the *zamindar*. As Thomas Hinchman the supervisor of Malda reported- “the dependence of the *raiyat* on *talooqdar* is too great for the farmer to run under the hazard of falling under the displeasure of ... the latter”. The actual cause of this dependence can be understood, if we can understand the nature of *talooq* in Bengal. Unlike its counterpart in Awadh, a *talooq* in Bengal consisted of only a few villages or a small tract of ground³⁹. Hence the possessor of a *talooq* was able to attend the cultivation of every part of it. It improved by his care, the rent collection increased and it became more populous and valuable than those part of the district which remained under the direct management of *zamindar* or his officers⁴⁰. Obviously the relative

³⁸*Ibid* P. 105.

³⁹Ramsbotham, *op. cit* P. 105.

⁴⁰*Ibid*.

prosperity of the locality which comprehended the *talooq* implied that the *talooqdar* also became relatively well off. The *zamindar* had their own reasons to parcel out lands to these sub- *zamindar*. As the board of Revenue of the Governor Generals' Council observed there were dual advantage of the *zamindar* by this method⁴¹.

Firstly the creation of *talooqdari* would imply creation of a dependant group around him for better management of farflung *zamindari* especially in the riverine region of east Bengal. He could with the help of his *talooqdari* machinery know exactly what amount of land remained *cultivable* each year especially the calculation of *Dariya shikast* (land carried away or destroyed) and *dariya buzurg* (new land formed by the aluvium locally called *char jaga*- awakening of land). In eastern Bengal where *talooqdari* system was practiced- *abad* (habitation) and *chash* (cultivation) of new land in the river tract had been a source of traditional feud among the *zamindars*.

The second benefit which the *zamindar* derived from this parcellization was that through the *talooqdar* he would receive the rent *gists* at an earlier period than that at which he was compelled to pay his revenue to the government. No doubt the *zamindars* of Jessore were adamant to assert their that a *talooqdar* engaged to pay his revenue through the *zamindar* cannot be allowed to pay his revenue directly to the government⁴².

⁴¹BOR Progs., Vol. 92 P. 441, Boards minute dt 24. 5. 1790.

⁴²BOR Progs., dt 24. 5. 1790. Discussion on Thomas Law's minutes and enclosures.

However the practice of paying revenue directly to the government by the *talooqdars* was quite vogue in the eastern districts. In certain parts of Dacca, as N. K. Sinha had shown- *zamindari jumma* was quite insignificant in proportion to *talooqdari jumma*⁴³. In the *pergunnahs* of Jalalpur, Chandradwip, Bikrampur, Rajinagar, Mysendee, Essakabad and Hyderabad, there were 4177 *talooqdars*, big and small. *Talooqdari jumma* was Rs. 142840 as compared to the meagre *zamindari jumma* of Rs. 21000⁴⁴.

⁴³N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal*, Vol. II P. 125.

⁴⁴BOR Progs., Vol. 25 (14- 31May 1790). Enclosures. Excerpts of letters received from the collector of Dacca.

The collector of Dacca wrote in 1790 that there were four kinds of *talooqdars* in the district⁴⁵.

Jungle bade Enterprising people undertook cultivation of swamps or jungle lands and when the *tuckseem* was made these newly cultivated lands were constituted *talooqs* and included in the *jummabundy* of the nearest *zamindar*⁴⁶. The *zamindar* only received the *malgujari* according to *kistbundee*. The succession was hereditary and if there were no heirs the *zamindar* managed on behalf of *Dewan*.

Jer Khareed- Those *talooqdars* were at liberty to sell their *talooqs* by bills of sale with or without the permission of the *zamindar*. On failure of heirs, *zamindar* could take possession or sell the lands. These *talooqdars* were subject to increase or entitled to remission proportionately with the *zamindar* agreeable to their respective *jumma*.

Pattae- The *zamindar* could grant hereditary *talooqdari Patta* to persons for lands belonging to themselves called *neez* (own) in which it was stipulated that management would descend to their heirs. But the *talooqdar* could neither sell nor

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ H. Beveridge, *Districts of Bakhurgunje*, corroborates from instances from other districts also, that in case of *jungle badi talooq*, no revenue needed to be paid for first two years by the *abadkar* (i.e. who brought waste lands into cultivation). *Jungle badi talooq* was basically an incentive given to the enterprising people to take landless and destitute people from the other districts to the jungle areas mostly in Sunderbans (situated in the lower deltaic tract of the Ganga) where *char* were created. This practice continued even in the mid twentieth century as immortalized in Manik Bandopadhyaya in *Pdma Nadir Majhi*.

makeover by deeds of gift the lands of *taloq*. In case of failure of issue the land reverted to *zamindar*. *Pattae talooqdars* were subject to increase or entitled to remission proportionately with the *zamindars*.

There was a type of small *taloqdars* who may be classified as *taloqdars* under other *taloqdars*, the latter were perpetual lease holders⁴⁷. Basically the description of the *taloqdars* in Dacca would lead one to understand that there were no independent *taloqdars* in the district. But considering the vast amount of *taloqdari jumma* realised from the district, independent *taloqs* were in existence here as well as in other parts of Bengal, and some of them were really very small⁴⁸. In a list of independent *taloqs* paying revenue at Krishnanagar, but under the *zamindari* of Burdwan, there was one paying an annual *jumma* of Rs. 26. Similarly in Nadia there was one paying Rs. 24 as *jumma*. Sinha categorises the independent *taloqdars* as *Huzuri talooqdars* paying revenue directly to the *Khalsa*. These tenure originated in the neighbourhood of the 'principal muslim cities' Murshidabad, Hooghly, Dacca. In the original (probably the one ascribed to Todar Mall) rent roll the *huzuri talooqdari* assessment was estimated at Rs. 95,000.

Most of these *taloqdars* were "rich and prominent individuals" (N. K. Sinha's description) who obtained these grants in the neighbourhood of administrative seats and business centres. Of the value of these *taluqs* there was a fixed assessment and

⁴⁷N. K. Sinha, *op. cit* P. 127.

⁴⁸*Ibid.* P. 126. Sinha suggested a qualification to documents in GGC progs., Vol. 152 and cites a letter by James Stuart in Vol. 129.

no provision was made for future increase. the owners were exempted from the *zamindari* jurisdiction. Sinha thinks that perhaps they had purchased the privilege⁴⁹. They could therefore transfer by sale their right of property. According to Grant this was done only with the permission of the Dewani representative on the spot. What Sinha overlooks here is that by granting these *taloos* the administrative and revenue bureaucracy were allowed a footing in the landed society., who during the turmoils of mid- eighteenth century, were able to entrench themselves in more secure positions.

In contrast to the *Huzuri talooqdars*, those who paid their public dues to the *zamindars* were termed *Mazkuri* or *Muzkuri* (*mazkur*= recorded) by the Company's administration, incidentally, these persons were not seen in any other light than as ryots, holding in the usual form of a *Patta* or indefinite lease, a perfected right of occupancy while complying with the assessed demands of the government⁵⁰. But this cannot be taken to be the time honoured practice. According to *Sadar Qanungo* Mahendra Narayan, when a *Mazkuri talooqdar* complained of oppression and injustice against the superior *zamindar*, the government always listened to his complaints and by way of redress to him and punishment to *zamindar*, separated his *taloos* and allowed him to pay directly to the government or placed him under some other *zamindar* at his request. Hence it is erroneous to conclude that the difference between a *huzuri* and *mazkuri talooqdar* lay in the fact that one had the capacity to

⁴⁹*Ibid.* pp 125- 126

⁵⁰IOR Home Miscellaneous, Vol. 204, Bengal Revenue Consultations dt 12 May 1770.

extricate himself from the *zamindar* and the other had not. Krishkanta Nandy the banian of Warren Hastings when interrogated by Clavering said that *huzuri talooqdars* were like *zamindars* in all respects. They normally enjoyed the privilege of even augmenting the rent. They were responsible for the administration of local justice and presided over the caste *cutcherry*⁵¹.

In case of *muzkuri talooqdar*, if he was driven out by the *hakim* for notorious bad conduct or for disputing the revenue, the talooq reverted back to the *zamindar*. Further it was not the *zamindar* but ~~the~~ *muzkuri talooqdar* who was responsible for the payment of the revenue for the *talooq* in case of natural calamity.

The *talooqdari* lands on the other hand as the Collector of Hooghly noted were exempted from the settlement based on detailed enquiry⁵². But this claim was controverted as it might be felt that *talooqs* issuing from the *zamindaris* must be subject to some conditions. Yet in Hooghly custom seem to prevail in favour of *talooqdars*⁵³. It is interesting to note that even a *zamindar* could assume *talooqdari* rights by purchase. In Dacca, the *zamindar* of Tappa Zafarnagar was *talooqdar* by purchase of *mouza* Salkia, Tappa Alinagar and a part of *mouza* Conya in Tappa Haveli *pergunnah* Jehangirpur.

The specificities of Bengal regarding *talooqdari* rights were unique, especially

⁵¹ *Ibid.*

⁵² *Ibid.*

⁵³ Shore in his minute of 2nd April 1788 said that lately they (i.e. the *talooqdars*) have been made subject to an enhancement of rents, but he (i.e. Shore) believed this to be contrary to the regular practice and usage. Firminger (ed) *5th report* Vol. II P. 93.

when contrasted with Bihar where the *talooqdars* had the same rights as *zamindars* i.e. a *milkriyat* right of ten- percent (of the revenue)⁵⁴.

The *talooqdars* whose lands had not been separated from the *zamindari* of which they were portions, paid their seats to *zamindar* at a fixed rate consisting of the *toomar jama* and an addition for contingency expenses. But some were assessed according to the viable demands of the government upon the *zamindar*, and paid their proportion of all the charges for which he was answerable. *Talooqs* of later description were chiefly acquired by purchase or gift or on condition of cultivating waste or forest lands. In Bengal such *taluuqs* far exceeded the proportion of those separated from *zamindari* jurisdiction⁵⁵.

All *talooqdars*, unless restricted by the terms of their grants, held a right to dispose of their lands by sale, gift or otherwise, but these were subject to the same dues to which they themselves were liable. The customary right to alienate was so strong, says Shore, that it was being exercised even "in opposition" to the terms of the *pattas* granted by the *zamindar*⁵⁶.

The *zamindars* wielded power as local blocks of authority and controller of corporate resources in the area. No where is it so explicitly evident as it is in their ability to alienate parcels of rent free grants. These grants were granted to Brahmins and favourites, the professionals serving in revenue collections, watchmen and

⁵⁴Habib *op. cit*

⁵⁵Firminger *op cit*, Shores minute of 2nd April 1788

⁵⁶*Ibid.*

also, personal servants for the *zamindar* and his family. Classified in the accounts as *chakran Dastoor* or *Bazi Zamin*, these grants were made under different heads like *Virt* (from Sanskrit *Vritti*= stipend), *Brahmottar*, *Khosbash*, *Devottar* and *Nazr Imam*.

Among the Bengal *zamindars* the Rajahs of Nadia, well known for their patronization of Sanskrit learning granted maximum lands for supporting Brahmins. Granted to settle scholars of ethic (*Nyay*) and *Kabya* (literature) or even to marry off destitute women, almost a community of patronised persons evolved who were known as *daanbhajan* (grantees) of the Nadia Raja. This patronization enabled the *zamindar* to obtain social sanctions which were otherwise not available⁵⁷.

⁵⁷For example, Raja Krishnachandra by donating lands to high caste *kulin* Brahmins, got the sanction to marry his youngest wife (mother of Sambhuchandra) and also to marry off his daughter which was otherwise not possible he being of *bhanga* (disturbed) *kulin* lineage.

Mohit Roy, *Nadiar Bidyasamajer Kahini*, passim.

The details of the grants made are available in the *Taidad* registrars and *Taidad* bundles lodged in Nadia Collectorate Record Room, Krishnanagar.

[illegible]

In *chackla* Jahangirnagar (in Dacca) the *Bazi Zamin* account for Bengali year 1178 (i.e. 1171- 72) shows that the grants under this head vary from about 0.06% (approx.) to almost 50% of the total area of land⁵⁸.

Name of the Pergunnah	Devotter	Brahmottar Chirag Birt.	Nazr Imam	Total amount
	Bigha	Bigha	Bigha	Bigha
Jallaulpur	2770	6065	1343	26406
Rajnagar	1110	2589	83	12880
Buzzer Gomedpur	1026	4843	1111	9557
Edelpur	716	1640	150	6233
Chandradwip	280	5968	402	12070

⁵⁸Computed from Progs. Com. of Circuit Dacca 8th Oct. 1772 PP 292- 311.

In *Birbhum*, the land granted by Assad Zaman Khan, the Pathan *zamindar* between 1172 and 1175 amounted to 91227 bighas 16 katha, which fetched the rent of Rs. 64,537 14 annas, 19 gondas. The *Pergunnah*- wise break up of his grants is as follows⁵⁹:

Pergunnah/ Talooq	Lands		Rent Amount		
	Bigha	Katha	Rs.	A	G
Swaroop Singh	575	8	904	5	1
Talooq Supur	429	14	624	4	17
Pgn. Shah Alampur	453	-	837	8	2
Pgn. Akbarshahi	136	-	178	3	-
Pgn. Burrah	127	14	331	12	14
Pgn. Cohonost	239	9	150	9	6
Pgn. Kerney	524	3	627	15	8
Pgn. Cuttanga	904	4	713	14	1
Pgn. Berkandah	9	2	7	1	3
Pgn. Jennijal	1227	7	1348	13	3
Pgn. Mallarput	51	-	59	7	-
Pgn. Qutubpur	139	13	442	3	8
Pgn. Barbakisingha	3205	4	4111	4	5
Talooq Hukumpur	50	-	74	10	-
Pgn. Alinagar	447749	3	-	-	-
Dauri Moulisher	35	-	35	11	14
Sen Bhoom	1279	7	1534	12	8
Hupoor	17	-	68	6	6
total	9437	10	12110	13	6

⁵⁹CCRM Progs. Letter received from Aexander Higginson Supervisor of Birbhum 5th Oct. 1770.

In the abstract of Chakeran *Zamin* of Birbhum were furnished with the details about the number of persons to whom grants were made, for what purpose they were employed, the amount of land alienated and the rent of those lands⁶⁰. A summary based on this abstract is given below:

For what purpose employed	No. of men	Land Bigha	K.	Ch.	Rent Rs.	A	G
For the head cutcherry	931	14271	3	9	12630	1	5
People employed by Rajah for his own purposes							
Sokerid Pissa	108	1908	2	2010	10	18	
Cas Geleib	310	8188	3	7537	3	5	
Car Kand	97	2054	16	1903	10	10	
Pergunnah Cutcherries	1907	2597	11	10	22128	12	17
For the protection of the towns							
Gram Negabunny Dohy	2492	21773	7	6	18232	13	2
Choukeys placed formerly by Raja							
Gaunt Chokey	837	11908	19	10	10612	8	9
The Choukey about Birbhum Kotwali	1272	14635	13	10	23180	11	6
People employed for collection and C. gram kotwali							
	4700	43619	3	19	25538	5	4
People employed to be answerable for robberies etc thanadarry							
	204	6385	10	0	4771	8	0
Grand Total	12853	150237	10	4	128346	8	13

⁶⁰*Ibid.* Letter received from Supervisor of Birbhum 10th Oct. 1770

Such elaborate data are also available for the *zamindari* of Edrekpur. The *chakeran zamin* given in lieu of wages in scattered forty three *pergunnahs* are classified under thirty nine heads which includes men performing different services, like cooking, tailoring, washing etc. as also, those performing the duties of collection, watch and warn in the *mujamil* and maintaining the accounts in the *sadar cutcherry*⁶¹.

**PARTICULARS OF THE CHAKERAN ZAMIN GIVEN TO THE SEVERAL SERVANTS OF THE FOLLOWING
PERGUNNAHS OF EDRAPORE IN LIEU OF WAGES**

pergunnahs	Rossiah Brahmin or cooks of the Rajah	Burdary or servants of the Rajah	Kidmutgars of the rajah	Dejee or Tailor of the Rajah	Surul Gur or a man to clean the guns	Dooby or washerman
Cass Taluk	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hoonchy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cossy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chorchoy	30''13	-	28''18	-	-	-
Soochargoosary	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogdoar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palladossy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ketloll	-	-	-	-	-	6''1
Azempore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Comardo	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chatnagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malgoom Islampore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Edrakpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moaktipore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgant	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bazetpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coharpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogleanpore	-	152''3	-	-	10''0	-
Sonatolah	50''8	117''19	13''14	19''15	13''10	5''8
Moispore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sengariah	-	30''3	-	-	-	-
Besnopore	-	-	-	-	-	-

⁶¹Committee of Circuit Rangpur Appendix to Progs. Vol. 10A (16- 21 Dec. 1772) f 217.

[continued.]

pergunnahs	Rossiah Brahmin or cooks of the Rajah	Burdary or servants of the Rajah	Kidmutgars of the rajah	Derjee or Tailor of the Rajah	Surul Gur or a man to clean the guns	Dooby or washerman
Ganganagore	-	47''7	-	-	-	-
Coosy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lolbarry	31''12	-	-	-	-	-
Woarigassy	-	-	-	-	-	0''9
Mettah	67''19	-	-	-	-	-
Hayatpore	-	-	93''5	-	-	-
Camnhow	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ramchunderpore	-	23''18	-	-	-	-
Loarlund	-	-	-	-	-	-
Barat	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore small	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chearygong	-	3''15	-	-	-	-
Dormodospore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fullbarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sontala	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boyjagher	-	-	-	-	-	-
Suneare	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bardore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Noontollah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Torophigh Bezole	59''8	136''2	• 8''3	15''3	4''9	32''3
Total Lands	240''	511''7	144''	40''6	24''4	66''18

[continued]

pergunnahs	Nai or Barbar	Zelliah or Cooli	Masselchy or a man for carrying light before the Rajah	Malakar or a man who puts flowers to Rajah's Thakurs	Chaperbund or a man who builds straw house	Garrywala or watch- maker
Cass Taluk	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hoonchy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cossy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chorchoy	-	-	-	-	-	16''13
Soochargoosary	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogdoar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palladossy	3''0	-	-	-	-	-
Ketloll	-	-	-	-	-	-
Azempore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Comardo	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chatnagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malgoom Islampore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Edrakpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moaktipore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgant	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bazetpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coharpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogleanpore	-	-	14''12	-	-	-
Sonatolah	21''17	18''2	-	23''11	-	-
Moispore	-	-	6''0	-	-	-
Sengariah	-	-	• 9''6	-	-	-
Besnopore	-	-	-	-	-	-

[continued]

pergunnahs	Nai or Barbar	Zelliah or Cooli	Masselchy or a man for carrying light before the Rajah	Malakar or a man who puts flowers to Rajah's Thakurs	Chaperbund or a man who builds straw house	Garrywala or watch- maker
Ganganagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coosy	-	-	1''16	-	-	-
Lolbarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Woarigassy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mettah	-	-	-	-	18''0	-
Hayatpore	-	-	33''15	-	-	-
Camnhow	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ramchunderpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Loarlund	-	-	-	-	-	-
Barat	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore small	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chearygong	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dormodospore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fullbarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sontala	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boyyagher	-	-	-	-	-	-
Suneare	3''19	-	-	-	-	-
Bardore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Noontollah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Torophigh Bezole	11''19	1''8	42''7	10''13	30''0	22''10
Total Lands	40''15	40''0	104''16	44''0	48''0	100''0

[continued]

pergunnahs	Chobdars	Majhee or a man who carries boats to a steamer	Kirtania or Chanters	Brahmin stationed on the worship place	Women to maintain worship place	Coamut or a man who kills the goats
Cass Taluk	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hoonchy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cossy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chorchoy	5''8	-	-	-	-	-
Soochargoosary	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogdoar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palladossy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ketloll	-	-	-	-	-	-
Azemapore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Comardo	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chatnagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malgoom	-	-	-	-	-	-
Islampore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Edrakpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moaktipore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgaut	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bazetpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coharpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogleanpore	-	-	-	-	-	12''14
Sonatolah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moispore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sengariah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Besnopore	-	26''9	7''17	-	-	-

[continued]

pergunnahs	Chobdars	Mayheer or a man who carries boats to a steamer	Kirtania or Chanters	Brahmin stationed on the worship place	Women to maintain worship place	Coamut or a man who kills the goats
Ganganagore	36''9					
Coosy						
Lolbarry						
Woarigassy						
Mettah						
Hayatpore						
Canthow						
Ramchunderpore						
Loarlund						
Barat						
Bycantpore						
Bycantpore small						
Chearygong						
Dormodopore						
Fullbarry						
Sontala						
Bojjagher						
Suneare						
Bardore						
Noontollah						
Torophigh	6''3	''11	23''2	90''15	24''5	3''3
Bezole						
Total Lands	48''0	27''0	134''0	216''0	44''5	30''

[Continued]

pergunnahs	Rajneah or Tom Tom beaters	Molleys or gardeners	Coolies for cleaining the grounds of the garden and till the grounds	Merdapiada etc	Sirdars or Pykes at sadar	Choukey- dets or watchman
Cass Taluk	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hoonchy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cosey	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chorchoy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Soochargoosary	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogdoi	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palladoosy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ketloll	-	-	-	-	-	5''12
Azempore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Comardo	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chatnagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malgoom	-	-	-	-	-	-
Islampore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Edrakpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moaktipore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Belgant	-	-	-	-	-	13''0
Bazetpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coharpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogleanpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sonatolah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moispore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sengariah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beenopore	-	-	-	-	-	-

[continued]

pergunnahs	Rajneah or Tom Tom beaters	Molleys or gardeners	Coolies for cleaning the grounds of the garden and till the grounds	Merda- piada etc.	Sirdats or Pykes at sadar	Choukey- dats or watch- men
Ganganagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coosy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Lolbarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Woarigassy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mettah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hayatpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camnhow	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ramchunderpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Loarlund	-	-	-	-	-	-
Barat	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore small	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chearygong	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dormodospore	-	-	-	-	-	3''15
Fullbarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sontala	-	-	-	-	-	-
Boyjagher	-	-	-	-	-	-
Suneare	-	-	-	-	-	5''0
Bardore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Noontollah	-	-	-	-	-	13''6
Torophigh- Bezole	25''10	2''17	136''12	129''8	2121''8	63''15
Total Lands	8''3	24''	192''	405''	3988''8	116''12

In other places of the Rangpur division such as Sultanpur we also have sporadic documentation of land grants by the *zamindars*⁶².

<i>Designation</i>	Lands Bighas	Gira Katha
Mundols or men for collecting the revenue	14	15
Cutwals to call the <i>raiyat</i> and Laster Collection	193	13
Pykes for bringing the <i>Khazana</i> to Rungpur	137	12
<i>Sirdars</i> stationed at the <i>Shikdars</i> ' and <i>zamindars</i> ' houses	242	-
Coolies for cultivating the <i>zamindars</i> ' common grounds	42	-
Bearers of the <i>zamindars</i> '	56	-
Haris (sweepers) for the use of the <i>Cutcherry</i>	5	-
Total	453	-

Alienation of land through *chakran* grants, symbolized two things. On one hand it showed the right of the *zamindar* over the soil whose rent he can alienate in lieu of wages, a miniature replica of the Mughal system of *Jagirdari* but different from it because it was not transferable.³ On the other, the *Brahmottar* or *Debottar* lands corresponded to the Badshahi grants of *madad-i- mash*. The second importance of this right of granting lands was that by this the *zamindar* could create a gathering of yes- men around him and that helped him to get social sanction for his deeds. During the Nizamat there was little interference from the state in the internal affairs of the *zamindari* provided he paid his stipulated dues in time.

The colonial rule however brought drastic change in the structure of the *zamindari* as an institution and opened up the microcosm. When the British assumed revenue collection, a new rigidity and exactness in the collection mechanism was

⁶²*Ibid.*

introduced. Naturally the social relations of property and production underwent a change. The *zamindar*'s actual status was defined and redefined by the colonial bureaucrats. Their actual position not only as rural intermediaries but **also** their influence on the local vortex of power underwent crucial change.

Chapter 2

THE PEASANTS

Research on the history of early British revenue system in Bengal has tended to concentrate on Government- *zamindar* relations, with only incidental references to the *raiyats*. A fresh look from the perspectives of the peasants and their predicaments is hence worthwhile.

From the grant of the *Dewani* in 1765 to Company's decision, to directly "stand-forth as Dewan" (1772), the administration was conducted for the most part through the institutions and structures inherited from 'Nizamat'. Experimentations were however carried out to enhance the rigidity in collection and to maximize the extortion of the social surplus in terms of land revenue. To understand the actual impact of the diverse experiments on the peasants and production, we need to survey the social relation of property and production of the period.

The land was divided into *raiyati* and *khamar* as Shore had pointed out¹. The term *khamar* was, according to Hunter, applied to lands which were originally waste

¹J. Shore, Minute of 7th June 1789, Firminger (ed) *5th Report II*, Appendix

[illegible]

but have been reclaimed. These lands were either retained by the *zamindars* or let out at grain rent². He also thought that *khamar* lands (like *Nijjote* lands) were home farms from which it got its name³. According to Shore principal difference between *Raiyati* and *khamar* was that the rent of the former is paid in cash while the later in kind⁴. In some cases as in Burdwan, *khamar* lands were cultivated by tenants at will. This mode of holding was called *Bhaggjote* and correspond to *Bhaoli* tenures of Bihar. Some times the arrangement was that the tiller had to deliver a certain amount of grain even if the crops failed. Land thus held was *Dhan Thika* tenure. It would not be appropriate to borrow the western European term *demesne* to explain *khamar* tenure, because there were no labour services or labour rent involved⁵. This is evident from Buchanon's observations on North Bengal that *khamari raiyats* were share croppers engaged in tilling other's land, the share being half of the produce.

According to Verelst, the *khamar* lands had neither any settled tenures, nor were they regulated by any uniform terms of agreement⁶. They were cultivated by contact whose customs and terms varied in different localities. In general, an advance was made by the *zamindar* to the tiller, after harvest the produce was divided between

²Hunter, Statistical account of Bengal Vol. VII P82.

³*Ibid.*, For more discussion on *Khamar*, see the chapter on The *Zamindars*

⁴Shore, *Ibid.*

⁵As argued by Sugato Bose. *The new Cambridge History of India* , Vol. III.2 p 69.

⁶H. Verelst, *A new rise progress and present state of English Government in Bengal* 22f.

them, the peasant getting half or third. The advance was a dire necessity for starting the production. However, the interest on the advance tended to eat up the tillers' eater share, which was itself set in an arbitrary valuation far below the market price.

In the twenty four *Pargunnahs* the *khamar* land was cultivated by the owners mainly with the help of casual migrant labour. Verelst's estimated in 1787 that the *khamar* land constitutes 33.5% of the total cultivated area in the said district⁷. The size of the *khamar* lands indicated, as Prof. Benoy Choudhuri has argued, labour scarcity in this district⁸. Verelst's report also suggests that the *khamar* cultivation did not normally grow into a stable peasant agriculture, largely because the condition of labour and were far from conducive to this.

The *raiyati* lands were the peasant's holdings. The characteristic feature of Bengals agrarian economy was, inspite of the existence of the big *zamindaris*, small peasant cultivation⁹. In the absence of detailed area statistics any idea about the standard size of the small peasant's holdings, is bound to be tentative, because it is based on the scattered references gleaned from our sources. Grant estimated that a single peasant proprietoe with a family of five can cultivate a maximum of 25

⁷Ibid. p 221. For the amount of *khamar* lands in other districts see the chapter on Zamindars.

⁸B. B. Choudhuri, "Agricultural growth in Bengal and Bihar 1770- 1860" in *Bengal Past and Present* Vol. 95 p 290. also *CEHI Vol. II* pp 297- 298.

⁹The classic case of marginalised Bangal peasant is borne in Tagore's poem. "Sudhu bigha dui Chilo mor bhuin / Aar sabi gache wrine [I had only two bighas of land, the rest was eaten up by debt] Rabindranath Tagore, *Dui bigha Jami (Katha O Kahini)*.

bighas¹⁰. Buchanon Hamilton found that in Dinajpur out of a total cultivated area of 6.6 million bighas, 3.3 million bighas i.e. 50% of the *abadi* (cultivated) land were held by peasants holdings between 15 to 30 *bighas* of land¹¹. The report of the Collector of Jessore in 1776 stated that average holdings of the more influential of the *raiyats* was 15 bighas¹². In Jelassore *pergunnah* of Midnapur the average holding was 20 bighas¹³. In Murshidabad in 1771 those cultivating between 10 to 100 bighas of land were called 'inferior' *raiyat* in official literature¹⁴. In Burdwan in a village of *Pergunnah* Bishmupur, the total *raiyati* land amounted to 25 bighas shared by five families (village Parralea). In another village 13 families shared 130 bighas. Whereas in *Pergunnah* Bhursut there was only 99 bighas of *raiyati* land (number of families not mentioned)¹⁵. Contrary to general assumptions, the *khamar* land in these villages were not large in size but ranged from 3 bighas to 64 bighas only¹⁶.

The terms of *raiyati jote* were either perpetual or subject to annual or fixed term (*raiyati*) arrangements. The term together ^{with} the area of holding were embodied in a *patta* or lease given to the cultivator and a *kabuliyat* or arrangement deed kept by the *zamindar*.

¹⁰Firminger (ed) *5th Report* II p 179.

¹¹Buchanon Hamilton *op. cit* p 906.

¹²Hunter, *Bengal Ms. Records* Vol. 1 p 52.

¹³PCR Burdwan Progs. dt. 6th June 1774

¹⁴CCRM Progs. dt. 19th Dec. 1771 f 111.

¹⁵PCR Burdwan Progs. dt. 16th June 1774.

¹⁶PCR Burdwan Progs. dt. 28th Sept. 1774.

However, in Bishnupur, one of the oldest *zamindari* of Bengal, evidences from *pergunnah* Barahazari and Bentali suggest that the *raiya* *patta* in general did not specify the area held in cultivation, neither the rent was regulated by such estimated area. The *raiya* was thus almost a tenant at will¹⁷.

There were different kinds of hereditary tenures that found mention in our sources.

The *huzuri jote* holders paid their revenue directly to the *zamindar* and not through the *tehsildar* or *gusmostha*. This was a privilege granted to the principal tenants in a village by way of conferring distinction. In Bogra district (which was part of Rajshahi till 1821) the *jote Pradhani* tenure was in vogue. Hunter thought that this tenure was a survival of the older system of collective responsibility of cultivation under the village community represented by the village headman¹⁸. The tenure was granted to the latter as a recompense for his services. Usually assessed at lower rates of rent than others, it consisted of choice fields. This form of tenure became means of bringing the headman under the control of *zamindars*. Till 1873 most headmen in this district held a small tenure of this kind¹⁹. *Pradhani jotes* were also *huzuri jote*, that is, they paid the revenue not to *tehsildar* but to the *zamindar*. This was thus a privilege granted to the principal tenant in a village. In Malda district this form of tenure existed under the name of *jote Mandali*, *mandal* being

¹⁷ *West Bengal Dist. Record, New series, Birbhum*, Letter received from assistant on deputation to Collector John Sherborne, dt. 5th August 1788.

¹⁸ Hunter, *Statistical Accounts of Bengal* Vol. VIII p 235.

¹⁹ *Ibid.* p 234.

the term for village headman.

A common form of holding popular in northern Malda and in the *daira mahals* in the west and south of the district, especially in Chanchal estates (where till 1814, *pergunnah* Hatanda and *pergunnah* Gaurband was ascertained to be entirely occupied under these holdings) was the *Hal Hasila* tenure mentioned in the records of our period²⁰. The peculiarity of this tenure (analogous to the standard Mighal arrangement) was that the tiller paid rent only for such lands as he might have cultivated during the year and the rate was proportionate to the kind of crop raised. There existed no written agreement, but the tenant was recognised to have a claim to cultivation without full right of occupation. The land actually occupied, and the rent varied each year. In 1873 it was still the headman of the village and not each individual peasant with whom the annual agreement and partition of cultivation strips was made by the *zamindar*. "The land to the east of the village is cultivated for one or two seasons, while the land to the west lies fallow and is used as a grazing ground for cattle. After two years, alternate arrangements were made²¹.

In north-eastern Bengal, the power and influence of the village headman was thus considerable. It extended to their distinctive status exemplified by the kind of tenures they held and by their influence over land distribution. In western Bengal we do not have here enough evidence to suggest a distinctive status given to the headman. But his influence was present, as exemplified by the prevalence of *Majhi*

²⁰Report of H. R. Reily Manager under the Court of Wards, Chanchal estates, 1873.

²¹*Ibid.*

jote found chiefly in *Santal* village²². The headman of the village, called *manjhi* entered into a settlement of his village, for a specified term from the proprietors. He sublet it in strips to others and derived a profit thereby. Hunter writes that this tenure was not based on any recently created rights²³. Differentiation then was a salient feature of even a tribal society.

Characteristically, the status of the headman in the agrarian society was such that atleast he was more prosperous than most of the small peasant proprietors. His influence was strengthened by the general tillers' paucity of resources to carry on cultivation or even subsistence in lean seasons. In Burdwan, for example, the *Mandal* supplied the poorer *sthanias* (resident) cultivators with loans on their crops to be raised, for their immediate subsistence²⁴. With the famine and subsequent changes the role of the *Mandal* underwent crucial mutations. This will be discussed in a later chapter.

The common forms of permanent tenures prevalent in widely diverse and distant areas as Rajshahi, Mymensing, Bogra, Malda, Burdwan (including modern Hooghly) and Birbhum were *Istamruri* and *mourasi jotes*²⁵. The tenures are generally classed as *kaemi* (established) *jotes*. In eastern Bengal it was referred to *Kaimi*

²²Reference to *majhi jotes* are found in *tauzi* bundle 32 (1769) Birbhum district Collectorate Record Room, Suri.

²³Hunter *op. cit* Vol. IV p 71.

²⁴PCR Burdwan Progs. dt. 6th May 1771.

²⁵*Ibid.* dt. 24th Sept. 1773.

Karsha, as in Bakharganj²⁶.

In Bakharganj most of the tenures were of heritable and perpetual nature, because here the area under jungle was greatest, (though the land was very fertile with regular alluvium deposits), an insecure tenure would not have induced peasants to undertake forest reclamation.

Istimari jote implied a transferable hereditary tenure not liable to enhancement.

Mourasi jotes were hereditary permanent tenures, (the literary meaning of *mourasi* being hereditary and is from the same root as *miras* (inherited), so often found in early documents²⁷. Hunter however wrote that in Birbhum the rent rates of *mourasi* tenures were not necessarily fixed in perpetuity²⁸. In Rajsahy the right of transfer

²⁶H. Beveridge, *The district of Bakharganj: Its History and statistics*, p 184.

²⁷*Mirasi jotes* are referred to in *Risala-i-Zirrat* cited by Z. U. Malik *op. cit* is also referred in a sixteenth century Bengali text *Chandi Mangal*. The poet Mukundaram Chakrabarti wrote in the *Atma kathar* (self- introduction) part:

Shahar Selimabaj (bad), tahate sajjan raj, nibase Neogi Gopinath/ Tahar taluke bos, Daminyae chash choshi/ Miras purush choy saat.

Translation: Gopinath Neogi is a descent person living in Selimabad town. We in Daminya (a village in Burdwan) which is under his *taluk* cultivate the land holding it in *miras* for six seven generation.

Thus it appears that the tenure was of hereditary and permanent nature.

It is interesting to note that the term *mourasi patta* (literally the lease paper of a *mourasi* tenure) in colloquial Bengali is used idiomatically in the sense of established right.

²⁸Hunter *op. cit.*, Vol. IV p 367 and Vol. VIII p 71.

was questionable and there were instances of the rent being declared liable to enhancement.

Mukarrari jotes were generally held by *sanad* on the basis of *mukarrari* agreements²⁹. A revenue document of village Burrough, *pergunnah* Swarupsingh, district Birbhum, referred to the *Mukarrarah raiyat* as those fixed by holding a *sanad* for six months³⁰.

Hunter wrote that this tenure was dependent on the terms of agreement and unless duly registered were liable to be void. Upon the sale of the parent estate to which the tenure belonged³¹.

The other forms of *miyadi* (time barred) holdings were those cultivated by *raiya* having *thika* (contract) on *Sanjha* (share) pattas.

A document from Burdwan suggest that the *Sanjha* (share) *raiya* paid lower rents and held their tenure "in form of renewable agreement"³². They were not entitled to remission. The evils of *Sanjha* as Ranajit Guha pointed out, were more palpable because the invariability of the quantity of produce due as rent made the cultivator quite defenceless in the face exigencies of the season³³. The ruin of crop

²⁹Aditi Nag- Choudhury Zilli however implied that the word *mukarrari* means unalterable, *The Vagrant Peasants*, p 68.

³⁰Birbhum Collectorate Records, Enclosure to letter issued to President BOR (Letter dt. 16th August 1787).

³¹Hunter, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV p 367.

³²Aditi Nag- Choudhury Zilli, *op. cit.*, p 68 refers to this without citing the document

³³Ranajit Guha, *Intro. to West Bengal District records New Series Burdwan letters issued 1788-1800* p XV.

Guha thus contradicts the report of the Mr. Hesilridge, the assistant on special duty on the plight

due to drought or inundation would lead him either to desert or surrender further to the userer.

Other than the *sthaniya* i.e. resident *raiyat*, who were known by different names like *hari*, *mirasi* or *khudkasta*, there were different types of non- resident *raiyat*. Generally referred to by the term *pahikast*, there were however intricate variations in their rights and status according to the specified time, for which they were associated with tilling a particular area.

A document of 1175 Bengali year (i.e. 1769- 70) listed the types of non- resident *raiyat* as follows³⁴:

Neez Ganj or neez Gaon (own village)- *raiyat* of the village for twenty four months i.e. two year.

Beer Gird- *raiyat* of neighbouring village tilling for eighteen months.

rt of neighbouring provinces, not resident for twelve months.

Mukarrara- *raiyat* holding sanads for six months.

Aditi Nag Choudhury Zill is however of opinion that *Neez Ganj* or *Neez Gaon* *raiyat* in post famine days were the *mondol* or village headmen, who with the help of *pahikasht* labour obtained possession of deserted land in their own villages and reclaimed them³⁵. Those who committed their resources to the reclamation of waste land in other villages came to be known as *Baze Gaon pahikasht* (a term previously

of the *Sanjha raiyat*.

³⁴ *Birbhu District Records, op. cit*

³⁵ Aditi Nag Choudhury Zilli, *op. cit.*, p 48.

used for the migrant *pahikasht raiyat*. In the post- famine decade both *Neez Gaon* and *Baze Gaon raiyat* paid a lower rate than the resident *raiya*.

The *khudkasht raiyat* paid Rs. 5 As. 13 pice along with *abwabs* according to the rate of 1768 whereas the migratory *pahikasht* entering new territories paid only Rs. 4 and 8 annas per bigha.

It appears there were quite a variety of non- resident temporary tillers. In Birbhum it was a constant headache of the Nagore Raj (i.e. the Pathan *zamindar* family of Rajnagar) to settle new peasants in *Banjar* (fallow) lands, who who needed all possible incentives in the form of favourable tenures. One of them was the *Kharij Kharida jote*- which Hunter described as a holding settled at quite- rent in consideration of a specified sum of money being paid to the granter³⁶. But in the *sanad* issued to the speichlaal and five *raiya* for five bighas of *Khariji Banjar* land for *abad* (habitation the stipulation was that for three years no revenue would be levied, only from the fourth year was payment to be levied if it became *abadi* (habitable)³⁷.

In the *sanad* to Raicharan Ghose for four bighas of *Banjara* land on terms of *khosbash raiya*³⁸. It was acknowledged that when *Banjara* land was granted to *Khosbash raiya* for his habitation and maintenance, it by custom paid no revenue. The rate of *Khariji* land if given to a *Khosbash raiya* was one half of the established revenue.

³⁶Hunter, *op. cit.*, Vol. IV p 367. Reference to *Kharij Kharida jote* in *Surul Nathi Sangraha* (Viswabharati Mss Collection) Doc. no. 7 f.1, 1186 B.Y.- 1780 A.D.

³⁷*Ibid.*

³⁸Viswabharati Mss. Collection, Doc. Acc. no. 63 f a B.Y. 1203 (1795)

In the fourth year it paid full revenue. It thus appears that *Khosbash* holdings were privileged holdings. A *Kabalapatra* of 1203 Bengali year i.e. 1796- 97 shows that *Khosbash* tenures were alienated through sale, but the right of the subtenants over the soil remained in fact. The document stated that Viswanath Barujya and Kasi-nath Barujya, son of late Kalicharan Barujya, sold 3 *bigha* 8 *katha* *Khosbash jamin* in village Krishnanagar, *pergunnah* Barabaksingha for rupees thirty five. Interestingly the subordinate rights of four families of *halbasat praja* (literally, resident cultivator subject) were also transferred to the buyer, Paban Chattopadhyaya son of Parikhsit Chattopadhyaya resident (Sakin) of surul. From other documents of the same series it appears that *Khosbash* tenures were generally granted in a festive occasions to Brahmins or others as a mark of favour³⁹. The above mentioned document also highlights the existence of subtenurial holdings.

Another form of tenure which is widely referred to in the Surul *Nathi* was the *Moshahat* or *Mushahat* tenure in documents belonging to B.Y. 1186 i.e. 1780⁴⁰. But details about the nature and conditions of the holding are unfortunately not available.

Miadi or *jotes* for fixed periods were common in north- eastern Bengal. In Rajshahi and Bogra we find reference to an interesting variety tenure called *Zar-*

³⁹ *Ibid.* and also Doc. Acc. No. 56 f iii B.Y. 1202, 1794 A.d. *Hukumsud*.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.* *Surul Nathi Sangraha* Doc. no. 7, 11, 12, 13.

The term *Moshahat* in Persian means measured lands.

*i peshgi*⁴¹. It was *miadi* or temporary lease granted on the receipt of an advance (*peshgi*) from the lease. The proprietors right of regaining the holding at the expiry of the term was contingent on repayment of the advance. The deed constituting the form of lease usually slated the amount of the advance in terms of rent for a stipulated period (viz. the rent of two or three years.). The term *zar- i- peshgi* (money advance) was properly applicable only when the tenure was given on an advance of certain amount of stipulated *jumma*. When the tenure was given as security for the repayment of a definite sum of money, borrowed upon the usufruct of the land, then the tenure was called *daesudi* (the burden of interest)⁴². The later form was basically a mortgage while the former was a holding conditional to advance payment of rent for the stipulated time by the *Karfa jote*, superior cultivator who had a right of occupancy, could sublet a portion of his holding. In Malda these tenants had to pay a definite number of maunds of produce per *bigha*, irrespective of the actual amount of produce reaped. He thus had to shoulder all the risks.

It thus appears that the period of early colonial impingement, the agrarian structure of Bengal represented a stratified society. The stratification was further enhanced due to macro- level occurring in the seventies of the eighteenth century- the drastic demographic changes of the post famine period and the enhancement in the rigour of surplus extraction. Production of high value and capital intensive crops could not be easily raised by small peasants since they were unable to maintain

⁴¹ Progs. BOR 1774 Appendix.

⁴² *Ibid.*

themselves during long duration of turnover i.e. completion of an entire harvest cycle relating to given crop rotation⁴³. Such peasants are often to take usurious loans even for carrying out grain- production, especially before harvests.

Another factor inhibiting the raising of market crops by the poorer peasants was tax- rent system., which, based on the concept of crop sharing, imposed higher money- rents on land where the more valuable crops were raised.

The land employed in the culture of mulberry plant (to feed the silk worms) required much labour, time and expense; yet the peasant was allowed no remission on his rents⁴⁴. Colebrooke's computation of 1794 showed that the all Bengal average rate of cultivating a bigha of land sown with the following crops⁴⁵:

Grain	Rs. 2.
Tobacco	Rs. 2.
Mulberry	Rs. 2.

Not to mention the variation in comparative costs as affected by the quality of the soil. In the rocky laterites of Birbhum, the cost of cultivating cash crops was five times that of food grains⁴⁶. The long gestation period of each cash crops

⁴³Mughal emperor Akbar made the agricultural year official by declaring 10th Sept. 1555 the beginning of 963 *fasli*

⁴⁴*Burdwan District records, N.S.* Letter received. Extract from the Progs. Committe of Circuit, Cossimbazar, 25th August 1772.

⁴⁵Colebrooke, *Op. cit.* pp 62, 65, 75, 92.

⁴⁶Ranjan Gupta, *op. cit.*, pp 49, 61.

also made this cultivation difficult for peasants with really limited resources. This was espacially true of mulberry⁴⁷. The tax for cash crop growing lands were also generally very high, compared to grain lands. In *pergunnah* Mergodah, Jelasore, high lands with an output of three cash crops a year were rated at Rs. 10 As. 3 gondas 10 as compared to paddy growing fields being rated at rs. 3 As. 6 gonda 10 per bigha⁴⁸. In *pergunnah* Moinachura in Midnapur the established revenue rates were as follows⁴⁹:

Categories of soil	Rate for high value Crop lands	Rate for food grain lands
A	Rs. 6	Rs. 3
B	Rs. 5	Rs. 2 As. 8
C	Rs. 3	Rs. 2

⁴⁷N. K. Sinha, *Economic History of Bengal* Vol. 1 p 105.

⁴⁸Progs. PCR Burdwan dt. 23rd May 1774.

⁴⁹*Ibid.* Progs. dt. 30th May 1774.

In Birbhum the average rent mentioned in the *Nirick* (rent survey) of 1175 B.

Y. i.e. 1768- 69 was as follows⁵⁰:

ASAMI TYPE OF LAND	RENT PER BIGHA	
	Rs.	As.
Khyne hole (production rice with a crop of other grain)	0	14
Sattu Math (Ground of yearly rice crop)	A	0
	B	0
	C	0
Zole (Jola) (Ground as situated to be inundated and retain the water, generally more productive from the detritus washed down)	A	0
	B	0
	C	0
Soonah (high lands producing an autumn crop of aus paddy and cold weather crop of pulses and oil-seeds)	A	0
	B	0
	C	0
Zey Cappa (cotton ground ordinary)	A	0
	B	0
	C	0
Do Cappa (Two crops of cotton)	A	1
	B	1
	C	1
Do Ookh (A crop of sugarcane)	1	2
Toot Cappa (Mulberry and Cotton ground)	A	1
	B1	2
	C	1
Bastu (residence, usually high lands)	2	8
Oud Bastu (Enclosure for cattle)	2	8
Tarkarry (Vegetables)	1	10
Sarshe (Mustard Seeds)	0	10

Here we find that the rents from cash crops growing lands were 25% to 37%, 0.5% higher than the rents for best paddy fields. Even for the necessities like (market) vegetables, the peasants paid a rent which was more than double of the paddy fields.

True that the profit margin was high for cash crops. As Colebrook computed, whereas the cultivator who produced grain was left with about 8.75% of the value of the produce, after meeting all his financial requirements, in sericulture i.e. mulberry plantation he could retain as much as 44.04%⁵¹. But grain cultivation provided the

⁵⁰ *Birbhum District records N. S.*

Letter issued Collector to Jhon Shore, President BOR dt. 16th August 1787.

⁵¹ Colebrooke, *op. cit.* p 63.

tiller his subsistence as well as a security of enterprise "in the face of any short run cycle of instability"⁵².

The issue of instability brings us to one of the recurrent themes in peasant history viz. rural usury. The peasant's susceptibility to fall for credit for his subsistence as well as for carrying out the production was hinged around hiatus between the production time for paying of rent instalments.

In *Karjpatra* (debt deed) of 1761, one Panchu Raj *raiya*t took seven rupees five annas from Sree Ganpananda Thakur (a Brahmin) to pay his rent list, in *Kartik*⁵³. He promised an interest of half an anna per rupee per month. He had to pay up within a month, or in default he had to pay in rice in the month of *Paush* (mid December) just after the harvest. Here we find the classic case of exploitation precipitated by the hiatus between the time of harvest and the paying off rent instalments. Not only was the peasant charged with a high rate of interest, but also by forcing him to pay by rice in harvest time. He was actually made to pay more (As the price would be lowest just after the harvest and hence the borrower had to pay more in kind to meet the money debt. exploitation persisted in the colonial period is amply borne out by another document of 1809⁵⁴. The intensity of extortion in fact increased. One Haromohan Roy took rupees one hundred and fifty, from Ramgovindo Sarkar,

⁵²*Ibid.* pp 66- 67.

⁵³The *karjpatra* bears the date *Chobisha Kartick* (24th Kartick) 1168 B.Y. Viswabharati Mss Doc. no. 328/125, Surul *Nathi* (unclassified)

⁵⁴*Ekrar* (*Karar Patra*) dated 1215 B.Y. Viswabharati Doc. No. 329/429. Surul *Nathi* (unclassified).

a member of Surul Raj family. The *ekrar* (agreement) stated that he had to pay back in kind, by *Poush*, rice worth rupees eighty one, and the rest of the principal with interest, in form of *gurh* (unrefined sugar made from immediate processing of sugarcane) in the month of *Phalgun* (February- March). This even when the peasant opted for a cash crop, the grains from it only went to meet his debt. It thus failed to become a 'surplus accumulator' for small peasant enterprise⁵⁵. Apparently the entire produce of an individual peasant might become hypothe-cated, before harvest, forcing sale at harvest price, immediately after harvest. It also induced him again in the vicious cycle of indebtedness during the lean seasons, for sheer subsistence. Occasional drought and inundations aggravated the situation. This made many peasants, resourceless themselves, entirely dependent on the advances from the rent- receivers usurers.

In Nadia, for example, it was reported in 1771⁵⁶ that land remain untilled "from the suspense the *raiyat* are in to know from whom they are to receive advances to enable them to go through the buisness of cultivation.

It is to be noted that this was the year following the famine. But it also demonstrates the crucial importance of these loans. Agricultural operations would come to a halt without them. For those who took seed loans, the mode of payment was in kind and apart from the high interest demanded, they were also cheated in weight.

⁵⁵For a discussion on the condition albeit similar prevailing in Gorokhpur in late nineteenth and early twentieth century, see Shahid Amin *Sugar cane Sugar Production in Gorokhpur*.

⁵⁶Progs. CCRM dt. 23rd May 1771.

Those who borrowed from *zamindari* officials, petty *mahajans* or even *sannyasis* and *fakirs* operating in the countryside⁵⁷, the rate of interest ranged between 24% to 35% per month in addition a *salami* to the lender at the time of repayment and this was to be paid in cash⁵⁸. To pay the rent the peasant had to sell at least fifty percent of his gross output⁵⁹. In Burdwan the village headman who advanced loans to resident cultivators, had to paid back in kind, estimated at the highest and arbitrary rate of interest⁶⁰. In Dacca the more affluent cultivators, often storing a year's stock of grain usually lent the surplus to their needy neighbours. For each mound of grain thus received the borrower had to repay 1 maund 20 seer i.e. 50%⁶¹. The situation was *pari passu* prevalent all over Bengal.

This also reflects the existence of a sort of patron- client relationship. No doubt patronage was but the other face of the exploitation, though the very existence of the small peasant was dependent on it.

Buchanan Hamilton's survey in Dinajpur (1807) showed that out of a population of 3 million, 1.63 million were menial, *jalachal*, (whose water is defiling) i.e. 54.2%

⁵⁷For their involvement in credit transaction, see Atish Dasgupta *Fakir and Sannyasi Raiders in Bengal*.

⁵⁸BOR extracts from Misc. Progs. 1772- 76. Progs. of January 1775 folio no. 104- 11, 130- 31.

⁵⁹Computed by John Shore in his minute of 18th June 1789. Firminger (ed) 5th Report Vol. II p 27 para 109.

⁶⁰Progs. PCR Burdwan dt. 16th June 1774.

⁶¹Taylor *A sketch of the topography and statistics of the Dacca District* pp 297- 298.

of the population was of low caste⁶². Agricultural labour was, therefore, easily available. Ranjan Gupta has also pointed out that in Birbhum in mid- eighteenth century, land was tilled by aboriginal labour employed on wages⁶³. In a document from Birbhum which gives the expenditure on *munish* or labourer engaged in reaping and arranging harvested crops in bundles, we can have some idea about the mode of payment⁶⁴. In 1166 B.Y. 1759- 60 such a labourer was paid one *gonda* or 4 *paisa* as *khoraki* (subsistence) if they are reapers (*Dhanya Katan Munish*) and 2 *paisa*, if they arranged only the crops in bundles (*Dhanya eten Munish*). Over and above the *Khoraki* the expenditure on these labourers was three annas plus one anna as price of liquor. Each of them also got 6 pans of straw. In exchange of this payment the reapers had to cut the harvest of seven *jotes* i.e. around 126 bighas of land [1 jote= 18 bighas] each while the others had to work on 10 *jotes* or 180 bighas each. In cidentally this also appears from this document that among the menials, agricultural operations were attributed according to the status of their subcastes. The reapers were *doms* (scavengers) and the burden of their work was accordingly heavier. But those who arranged the crops in bundles in the husband man's granary, the *Bauris*, though also of the defiling *jalachal* (whose water is polluted) caste, were of a higher sub- caste status (basically *bauris* are low caste agriculturists) and hence they were allowed to come in proximity of the husband man's homstead⁶⁵. (The individual

⁶²Hamilton *op. cit.*, Book III Appendix C

⁶³Ranjan Gupta *op. cit.* p 55.

⁶⁴Viswabharati Mss Collection, Doc. no. 5971/1134 (unclassified).

⁶⁵Risley, *op. cit.*, pp 78- 81, 250, says that agricultural labour and palanquin bearing are

granaries are generally located around the homestead land to check theft).

Two documents of 1132 i.e. 1725- 26 of *mouza* Jhorhat (modern Howrah district) and *mouza* Ramchandrapur (in Burdwan) shows that a Brahmin family gave their tenure in *Bhag* (share cropping) to low caste tillers named *Ananta Bagali* (Bagal= cattle herders) and *Maniram Kaora* (a sub caste of Haari- a menial and scavenger caste of Bengal)⁶⁶. They themselves held the tenure as a *mukarrari jote* (fixed tenure). Considering the fact that there was a taboo on Brahmins touching the plough, as exemplified by the derogatory term, *Bamun Chasa* (a Brahmin who tills)⁶⁷, it was but natural that the low caste tillers should be used by them.

There is a popular saying in rural bengal '*Chasi Dukher Katha / Kaboki naba byatha / Aranye rodon seje*' i.e. the plight of the peasant is not new pain, but the speaking of it is like crying in the jungle. The colophon of Bengali Puthi *Su-damacharita* written in 1162 i.e. 1755- 56 may be cited to underline the peasant plight in 18th century Bengal⁶⁸. It was an year of drought 24 seers of rice was

supposed to be the original occupation of the *Bauris*, majority of them were under *raiyyat* and landless labour. A large proportion of the *doms* were nomadic cultivators and landless labour.

⁶⁶Viswabharati MSS. no. 154, folio 88c, 88d. The private accounts (*hisab*) of the family of Haridev Sharma, son of Krishnaram Sharma of Jhorhat. The folio is found inside the handwritten manuscript of *Rajmangal Kabya* composed by the former in 1128- 36 B.Y. In the *Atmakatha* the author states that they were a resourceful family living in a multistoryed mud house.

⁶⁷Ranjan Gupta, *op. cit.*, p 23 writes about the derogatory use of the term in Birbhum. Cf. Jan Breman, *Patronage and exploitation Changing Agrarian relations in south Gujrat* Chapter 4. He refers to the use of *hali* menials by the *anabil* (unpolluted) Brahmins of Gujrat.

⁶⁸Viswabharati MSS. Collection (unclassified).

available for a rupee, but it was scarce. Most people were standing, they went to other villages in search of work but in vain. The employers probably thought that if it rains by kartick (mid- October) then they will go back to their own villages to sow cotton. In other villages the headman likes a lot of flattery to do anything. In some villages the headman cheats on the land⁶⁹. (*Kudakheko* literary one who eats up lands under the kuda measurements). The *tahsildar* (collector) Tarachand, the *talukdar* Narayan Poddar, the *gumastah* Narayan Chatterji all will become friendly with Manick Mandal (the headman) during the month of Pans (being harvesting time it is also the time for the rent kist) and will pounce on the peasants.

What was the physical condition of the people is borne out in the text itself: "Gatro bate dari/ toilabhabe doijab ange Ure Khari" their (i.e. peasants) body is so emaciated that it is like a rope. Paucity of oils give their skin a *perched look*⁷⁰. In another chapter we will see how macrolevel developments like the famine and consequent depopulation brought changes in the agrarian relations. But before we move on to that we will discuss first another important component of agrarian relations in Bengal viz. the revenue apparatus and the revenue service gentry.

⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

Chapter 3

THE SERVICE GENTRY IN THE REVENUE APPARATUS

In the early colonial period, the Mughal revenue apparatus was used for the collection of revenue. At the same time since the grants of *Dewani* the English followed the settled objectives of maximization of revenue and economizing on the expenses of collection. Both the objectives necessitated the interception of revenue dissipating at the intermediate level. To achieve this, a rigidity and exactness in the method of collection, according to the stated *jama-i- malguzari*, was sought to be ensured. On the other hand the retrenchment of the revenue- service gentry and abolition of many of their perquisites including perks in lands were initiated to reduce collection costs.

Under the *nizamat* the Subah revenue- service hierarchy consisted of *Dewan*, the *sadr Qanungo*, the *Ray Rayan* and the *munshis* under him. At every territorial unit down to the smallest *zamindari*, the apparatus had an appropriate level of

officialdom. At the village level the *Qanungo* and *Ray Rayan* were represented by the *Patwari* and *muttsuddis*, and at *zamindari* level by *naib* and *gumoshta*. Besides, there were numerous officials embraced under the umbrella terms *Karmachari* or *amla*, who were not necessarily revenue officials but assisted in different administrative capacities, and who enjoyed rent free or low rented lands as part of their service perquisite. These tenures were known as *chakran* lands. The amount of revenue alienated through this type of rent free holdings is borne from a document from Kasimbazar¹. It states that the class of the tenure standing under the denomination of *Serrinjami* comprehend 18,867 bighas of land held by 1044 service holders. These tenures were mostly from the western division of Rajshahi. Similarly in the province of Dacca, 67131 bighas were alienated as *chakran* land. In five *pergunnahs* of Jeelaulpoor, Rajnagar, Buzurg Gomedpur, Chunderdeep and Edelpoor in Chakla Jehangirnagar as late as Bengali year 1178 i.e., 1771- 72².

¹Prabably from the Bengali word *chakra*- job.

²Progs. Commotte of Circuit Kassimbazar 16th July 1772

The *pergunnah* wise breakup is as follows³:

Name of the <i>pergunnah</i>	<i>Chakran</i> land		
	<i>Bigha</i>	<i>Katha</i>	<i>Chatak</i>
Jalalpoor	12589	9	2
Rajnagar	34158	16	3
Buzurg- Gomedpoor	2195	7	3
Chunderdeep	1694	5	-
Edelpur	3285	11	2

In Burdwan 31856 *bighas* were held by 33032 servants in 1770⁴. In Birbhum in 1770 an area of 143852 *bighas* were held by 12649 officials⁵. The size of the each unit of *chakran zamin*, varied according to the status of the servant and nature of duty performed, once the administrative apparatus was a fairly stratified organization.

³*Ibid.* Dacca 8th October 1772

⁴*Ibid.* Progs Select committee dt. 28th Oct. 1768

⁵Progs Select Committee dt. 28th Oct. 1760.

For example in Burdwan:

Nature of duty	Percentage of total number of servants	percentage of total lands
Rajds house hold	14.7%	22.4%
Gaurds of thanas , forts etc.	14.9%	23%
Revenue officers in <i>pergunnahs</i>	8%	10.6%
Revenue officers in villages	62%	44%

Other than *Chakran* in different parts of Bengal, higher revenue officials, enjoyed perquisites like *nankar* or *nijjole*⁶.

A branch of the revenue service was formed by the *qanungos*, whose office was established for conducting and regulating the royal revenue. In Bengal, at some stage, a hierarchy of these officials was established. An English document of 1771 bears the following description of the office and its growth⁷:

“ One Muckan Roy was appointed with the exclusive power of nominating inferior *qanungoes* conferred upon him and his discendents, in whom it has ever since continued without alienation and is at presented vested in the person of Jaggenant Roy residing at Moorshidabad, who by virtue of his superiority is entitled to a certain commission on the amoluments of the inferior *qanungoes*.

The original benefit accruing from this office was a *Russom* or Commission of 5 *gondas* per rupee of the revenue of each district in which they officiated. But it too frequently happend that they were unable by the nature of their appointment to extend their advantages beyond their

⁶Progs. Committee of Circuit Dacca 3rd Oct. 1772, folio no. 15.

⁷Extract of a letter from Walter Wilkins, Collector at Dacca dt. 5. 9. 1771 to the CCR Murshidabad.

original limits as seems to have been the case of the *qanungoes* of these province”.

If we read this concurrently with the documents unearthed by H. R. Ghosal about the Mughal *farmans* relating to the appointment of *Sadr Qanungo* in Bihar, the picture becomes more clear⁸.

The *farman* have the seal of emperor Aurangzeb and the relevant text runs;

“...bestowed pursuant to ancient custom ...the office of the *qanungo* of the whole province of Bihar together with its sircars as particularized at the back, on *Dharanreedhar*, Jagat Ram and Roopram, sons of Dhanraj and Lalchand, heirs of Kesodhar. Let them perform the duties of office ...let them transmit yearly as it is usual to the exalted registrar office, geneological lists of families with account of the former and present state of augmentation and decrease of population. Let them not expend or receive more than eight annas in the hundred rupees, exclusive of *Dastoes* and *nankar* admitted by ancient privilege and let them not consider the appointment and removal of their subordinate vested entirely on themselves ...considered the above persons with their descendants from generation to generation, from heir to heir for ever and perpetuity, fixed and appointed to the office ...they look upon themselves as preserved and shielded from all injury of dismissal and charge.”

These two documents highlight how the *Qanungo*’s office became a post of power and position shielded by its hereditary nature and the right to appoint and dismiss subordinates. It is interesting to note that their actual emolument was not very high.

⁸H. R. Ghosal, “Two Mughal *Farmans* relating to the appointment of *Sadr Qanungoes* in Bihar.” IHCP 1958. Incidentally these farmans were produced to Shital Roy and John Shore to confirm the Badshahi grants, implying that they enjoyed a service tenure.

The office of the *qanungo* was basically to have a check on the primary revenue collector, the *Choudhry* and the higher officials in revenue collection hierarchy. However, this basic principle started to be flouted even in high Mughal days. We have a document from 1687 A.D., the 29th Julus (i.e. 29th regional year) of Aurangzeb that Gokul Chand *Qanungo* of *Sarkar* Kamrup being appointed as *Choudhury* *kapasnama mahal* of *thana* Rangmati which had a jumma of Rs. 3601⁹. The appointment of the same person as *Choudhuri* and *qanungo* signified the person's well connected position not only in the revenue collection hierarchy but also in the upper echelons of the Mughal Hierarchy. By the latest quarter of the eighteenth century the *qanungoes* used his office to have a well entrenched position in the landed society. The *sadar qanungo* apparently enjoyed the power of fixing the nine-tenth of the *zamindari* servants and *gumostas* in each *pergunnah*¹⁰. Usually the *taluqdars* and *choudhuris* were able to secure the favour of the *sadr qanungo* against the interest of the government by means of bribery¹¹. The *qanungoes* in Midnapur enjoyed taluqs at a very low rate, charging the deficiency upon other *taluqdars* and acted in collusion with the *gomoshta* of the *zamindar* and *taluqdars* to reduce the muffassil assessment of the district¹². In Chittagong the *qanungos* held a privileged tenure under the name *Gurupanchky*¹³. It is stated that holders of this tenure did not

⁹NAI Oriental Records Collection MS no. 2551/2.

¹⁰R. Roy, *Changes in the Bengal Agrarian Society* p 135 f.n 13.

¹¹*Ibid.* p 138 f.n 25.

¹²Progs. Board of revenue 22 June 1787. Prog. no. 78, Collector of Midnapur to BOR.

¹³Progs. Committee of Circuit Dacca 3rd October 1772, folio no. 14- 15. Extract from Progs. of

possess any *nijjote* land (implying thereby that others of the same rank held *nijjote* as well). The proprietors of this indulgence (i.e. *Gurupanchky*) paid a meagre rent compared to the revenues paid by the *zamindars*.

The actual assessment made by the Verelst comparing what they paid and what they would have otherwise paid brings out the importance of income accruing to them from their privileged tenure¹⁴.

Tenure	Dewani			
	Rupees	Anna	Gonda	Pai
Total amount payable by <i>qanungos</i> to <i>Gurupanchky</i>	10,465	6	19	2
As assessed by Verelst	35,288	11	7	-
Difference	24,823	4	8	2

It is interesting to note that even the clerks of the *qanungos* i.e. the *munshis* also enjoyed *Gurupanchky* the total rent paid by them being 1444 *Dhakai* rupees 10 annas 17 gondas while Verelst assessed the due claims at 4617 *Dhakai* rupees 3 Annas 10 gonda 1 pai¹⁵.

An English document of 1774 from Chittagong states that in that division *qanungos* have no dues or perquisites under the denomination of *rosoom* or *paotacky* like other districts of Bengal, but had grants of land in the early settlement of the province¹⁶. Here also the *Gurupanchky* tenure existed. The condition of the tenure included exemption from future increase of rents and taxes¹⁷. But in 1788 collector

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ H. Walter, Acting chief of Hastings, President Council of revenue 20th Feb. 1774; cited by H. J. Cotton *Memorandum on the Revenue History of Chittagong* p 185.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, The earliest *sanad* to this effect submitted to the acting chief of the division was issued by Hussain Khan dated the 15th year of the reign of Muhammad Shah.

Bird reported that the *qanungos* enjoyed a *rosoom takee* of six gonda and one courie from the *zamindar* upon the *assal jumma* of one rupee which appears on the whole (district) Rs. 1872, As 4 per annum¹⁸. Interestingly, the *qanungos* of Chittagong were not the inhabitants of that place but residents of Dacca. The *sherista daftar* was officially in the name of three brothers Ratan Ray, Joynarayan Ray, Adya Charan Ray (who were long dead). Their descendent enjoyed perquisites of the office. Nine resident deputies (*naib*) collected the *rosoom* on their behalf, from more than two thousands *zamindars* of Chittagong. But all these *naibs* were *zamindars* themselves and enjoyed the advantages of position like any other *zamindar*. Some of them possessed *gurupanchky* tenures also. In case of revenue disputes they also acted as *amins*¹⁹. The combination of the power of the *amin* and *naib*, *qanungo* and *zamindar* in the same person implied that the Mughal system of check and balance in the collection mechanism was jeopardised at the local level²⁰.

By 1781 the inferior offices under the *qanungoes* of Chittagong were mostly farmed out. The amount that the *qanungoes* received on this account was called *miran*²¹.

¹⁸Letter issued from Collector S. Bird, 9th Feb. 1788 cited in *Ibid.* pp 185- 86.

¹⁹*Ibid.*

²⁰Formally, if a *qanungo* had anything to do with the collection, a no objection certificate from the resident *rayats* was required cf. Doc 2551/25. The *parwana* to a *qanungo* of Coochbehar who also wanted a *qismat* (position) of *Choudhurian* (collectorship).

²¹Committee of Revenue Progs. 23rd April 1281 folio 168.

During the *nizamat* period, the higher revenue officials all tried to procure *zamindaris*. Laxminarayan, the *Sadr qanungo* held a vast *zamindari* at Rockanpur²². Darpanarayan *qanungo* secured a *zamindari* in Malda. Raghunandan Maitra the collector of customs acquired the Natore *zamindari* comprising large tracts in Rajshahi, Bhusna and Murshidabad, in the name of his brother Ramjiban²³. Other revenue officials also did not lag behind. Rajballav, deputy to the *naib* of Dacca and then the *Roy Rayan*, a *Vaidya* by caste, held his position on a hereditary basis. His son Gopal Krishna Sen dispossessed many *zamindars* by force or fraud and recorded those properties as *nijtaluk* in the name of his sons Pitambar and Kalishankar. the estate of Buzurg- Gomedpur consisted of *nijtaluk* Kalishankar *nijtaluk* Pitambar, and 47 *zimmas* comprising small *taluks* and *hoalas*²⁴. It thus appears the service tenures apart, the revenue service- gentry utilized their to create *zamindaris* of their own. It would indeed be wrong to think that this was confined to the upper echelons of the service- gentry, alone.

In the 1770, for the first time the old *zamindars* started losing part of their estates to farmers for defalcation of revenue, it was their own revenue agents and officials who acted as securities (*mal- zamini*) for them. When the *zamindar* was losing his prime lands for want of money to pay off his arrears, his servants even

²²*Ibid.* Appendix to Vol. 30 folio 225.

²³Abdul Karim, *Murshid Quli and his times*, p 218.

²⁴BOR Progs. 14th Oct. 1800 Prog. no. 21, Collector of Kalishankar Sen's share of *Pergunnah* Buzurg- Gomedpur.

became guarantors for the outsiders, taking up the farms as shown by examples gleaned from the records relating to the *zamindari* of Nadia²⁵.

Name of the Pergunnah	Name of the farmer the security	Name and designation of	Rs	As	Gonda	Par
Boroon	Mukundaram Singh	Krishnajiwan	91211	1	19	3
Joypur (Autanny)	Sambhu Roy	Mukherjee	10504	4	15	
Mamjwah	Radhakrishna Chatterjee	Dewan of the Rajah	35720	3	15	2
Piassey	Durgaram Mullick	Durgacharan	81098			
Talla	Ram Dutta	Buxey Gumoshta	8698			
Bahiquah	Durgaram Mullick	of the	17981			
Cowgachi	Durgaram Mullick	Rajah	1632			
Shikreah	Akul Mukherjee	Ramjoy Sing	8966			
Malreay	Ramhari Banerjee	naib of the	73572			
Baughmari	Kissen Chand Ghosh	Rajah	13315			

This is not an isolated case. In Burdwan ceded in 1760 to the Company by Mir Qasim, Bhawani Charan Mitra, the Company's *Dewan* was the second largest revenue farmer in the district²⁶. As the Company's *Dewan* during and after the famine, he had succeeded in collecting the government's full demand. Bhawani Charan was surpassed only by Gokul Ghosal who served Verelst in collecting revenues from Chittagong when this district was ceded to the Company. A Brahmin who served the Company's servants in both public and private capacity, and made a fortune through trade as well as landed property in Chittagong, he Burdwan lands in farm offering a higher assessment than the Maharaja's family, and also managed Burdwan *Pergunnah* around the Raj family's residence in the heart of the *zamindari*.

During the decennial settlement it was computed that the estate of Gokul Ghosal (then deceased) comprised *turf* Jayanagar (the principal *zamindari*), Hissa 5annas

²⁵Progs Committee of Circuit, Nadia and Kasimbazar, 22nd Oct 1770, 10R Range 69 Vol. 17. folio 62- 65

²⁶McLane, Land and Kinship p 217 Progs of 26th Oct 1775, Examination of Bhawani Charan Mitra

15 gonda of *Pergunnah* Selimabad, Hissa 8 annas of *Pergunnah* Bunderkollah in Dacca; 5 pye division of *Pergunnah* Coondy (Nadia), *taluk* Mominpur in Rungpur, *turf* Camarpurrah in *Kismat Pergunnah* Medumnal and *Kismat* Kolkatta, Sukchar, *turf* Brajoballav and *turf* Bankat Buldar Khaun in Twenty four *pergunnahs*²⁷. Of this *taluk* Mominpur was brought in the fictitious name of Jagannath Bhattarchya, Bunderkuleah was brought in the name of Bhawani Charan (the raashname according to zodiac signs used for horoscopes) by Gokul Ghosal and Sukchar was brought in the name of the nephews Jayanarayana, Ramnarayana, Luxminarayana and Ganganarayana.

In Chittagong we find that that how the new service- gentry were entrenching their position in revenue hierarchy. It was borne out in the list of farmers and their securities regarding the settlement of 1774. Joynarayan Ghosal, nephew of the Company's *dewan* Gokul Ghosal (1761- 64) acted as security for Gangadhar Mitra, while Santiram Qanungo uncle of Company's *dewan* Gourshankar (1790- 95) acted as security for his brother Bhawani Prasad i.e *dewan's* father²⁸. This intricate nexus implied that the older Mughal practice of keeping a check on the revenue bureaucracy was totally destroyed.

We now have to make some effort to identify what tenures can be brought by us under the term service tenure. Service tenures were basically denoted as *lakhraj*

²⁷Progs. BOR Burdwan Vol 258, Enclosure to Progs Dt. 20th April 1798. Letters from the Collectors of Dacca, Rungur and Twenty four *pergunnahs*

²⁸*Op. Cit.* p 309.

i.e. tax free. When this tenure was given in lieu of service then it is obviously a service tenure. But the question is whether the lands conferred upon Brahmins or to religious preachers will conform to the term service tenure. *zamindars* in eighteenth century liberally conferred rights resembling free hold properly on Brahmins and favourites and also on their own revenue- agents. But there were side by side *huzoori* or *badshahi* grants made by the emperor and his subordinate provincial officials. Mclane estimated that by the late eighteenth century a fifth of Bengal's cultivated land was alienated with or without service obligations.

A document from Dacca showing the *Bazi zamin* (unsurveyed) account of *chuckla* Jahangirnagar for the Bengali- year 1178 (1772- 73) shows the following heads and the amount of lands entered under each land (the total represents the sum of *Muhallat hazoory* and *Mohallat Nizamat*²⁹.

Heads		Bighas	Katha	Chatak
Devottar Lands for maintenance of duties	Mahallat Huzuri	25450	10	3
	Mahallat Nizamat	10178	3	3
	Total	35628	14	2
Brahmottar /Chirg Britt Lands given to the Brahmis or to maintain lamps at the grave yards, mazr	Mahallat Huzuri	89140	7	1
	Mahallat Nizamat	25345	2	3
	Total	114485	10	-
Nazr Imam (In salutation to the head of the Muslims) Kannah Godan (For pasture of cows donated to the Brahmins) Cheragi (To lit the lamp at the grave of great men	Mahallat Huzuri	9063	1	2
	Mahallat Nizamat	2479	6	1
	Total	11542	7	3
Khairat (Donation) / Enam (prize)	Mahallat Huzuri	6231	4	3
	Mahallat Nizamat	30	2	3
	Total	6261	7	2
Duftar Seranjami qanungo of the office (sundry expenses)	Mahallat Huzuri	1344	19	1
	Mahallat Nizamat	-	-	-
	Total	1344	19	1
Chakeran service tenure	Mahallat Huzuri	67131	9	3
	Mahallat Nizamat	3716	11	-
	Total	70848	-	3

²⁹Progs. Committee of Circuit 8th Oct. 1772 Dacca, Range 70 Vol. 15 10R. ff 292- 311.

From this table we can have a picture of the heads under which the *lakheraj* lands were distributed. In Birbhum we find that the Pathan *zamindar* till 1770 used to distribute *khairat* lands whose annual income was Rs. 6154 for which he paid no revenue. 4666 Bughas 7 Kathas of land which on an estimation of 1770 could fetch RS. 7595 was kept *Khaas* by Md. Tuckee Khan in 1168- 1171 (1761- 64). It was distributed by Assud Khan to his dependents. The same person distributes 13267 bigha 5 kathas in between 1172- 1176 (1765- 69) which by the same estimate could fetch Rs. 16405³⁰. The Nadia Raj were well known for their patronising Brahmins and men of eminence through the grant of rent- free lands *nishkar*. The *Taidad* documents in Krishnanagar collectorate (Krishnanagar was the capital of Nadia Raj) bear enough evidence of this sort of land alienation. We can refer to the *Mahatran* grant of 278 Bigha 11 Katha in *Pergunnah* Pajnour (Chaklaha) to the Chief Physician of *Raja* Krishna Chandra, Govindaram Ray³¹.

Besides this, we have other references to service tenures such as the *Pykan* lands ostensibly given to the paiks or armed retainues of the *zamindar* in lieu of pay. This was widely prevalent in Rungpoor and Coochbehar³². The mufassil revenue servants who were allowed ground in lieu of wages included *Tuckdar* (a man who collects the revenue.) *Patwar* (writer of accounts) *Bosineah* (head *raiyat* of a village) *Sirdar* (the

³⁰Birbhum Collectorate Records, Letter issued 5th Oct. 1770 from A. Higginson Supervisor.

³¹Govindaram Ray is referred in Bharatchandra's *Anandamangal* "*Badya madhye pradhan Govindaram Ray Jagannath anuj nibas Sugandha e*" Govindaram is the chief among the physicians. He is the brother of Jagannath and lives in Sugandha.

³²LCB Vol. 1 Letter dt. 24th April 1770, Supervisor of Rungpur to Becker, Resident at Durbar.

man who collects the revenue on behalf of a *Tuckdar*). *Paik* (the man who watches the conduct of the *raiyat* and helps to enforce the collections). *Hall Manjhee* (the man who brings the *raiyat* in the cutcherry of the mufassil). *Hurryda* or *Harinda* (the man who brings to collection after it is collected from the *raiyats*). If this was the picture of mufassil arrangement in Rungpur, at the *Sadr* there was the *Dewan*, the *peshkar*, the *tehsildar*, the *serishtadar*, *mohurees*, *moonshees* etc., in a way replica of the *niabat* unit³³.

³³Progs. Committee of Circuit at Rungpur Vol. 10, Appendix to Progs. of 16th Dec. 1772.

**LIST OF MUFFASSIL SERVANTS ALLOWED GROUND IN LIEU OF SALARIES, NECESSARY FOR
CONDUCTING THE BUISNESS OF COLLECTION IN THE COUNTRY IN EACH PERGUNNAH IN THE
PROVINCE OF RUNGPUR FOR THE BENGALI YEAR 1178 (1771- 72). ³⁴**

Name of the Pergunnah	Designation Tockedar		Designation Patwari		Designation Basineath	
	Total no. of servants	Lands given	Total no. of servants	Lands given	Total no. of servants	Lands given
		B-K-Ch-A		B-K-Ch-A		B-k-Ch-A
Futtypore 14 As.	2	1-14-2-0	47	2-8-5-0	19	0-11-19-8
Futtypore 2 As.	2	0-0-15-0	44	1-0-0-15	30	0-14-0-13
Chargyhat Colcha	4	0-13-2-6	68	0-4-2-16	70	7-5-0-5
Chargyhat Mushcoot	4		51		45	
Woodassey	-	-	7	0-2-5-12	4	0-2-5-0
Goriado	-	-	9	0-3-10-12	2	0-0-5-0
Tepah	2	0-3-6-6	-	0-15-13-1	29	1-18-10-9
Banit	-	-	17	0-5-11-9	9	0-5-0-10
Caeknah	15	0-12-17-2	116	4-4-19-1	110	6-8-9-15
Bamandanga	5	0-3-16-8	65	1-9-7-10	26	1-1-12-15
Pauga	-	-	3	0-1-3-12	4	0-2-4-6
Somnarayan	2	0-11-11-13	49	1-5-8-1	30	2-12-9-3
Chandro Kona	2	0-1-17-0	2	0-10-12-0	13	0-13-18-2
Barbuti	2	0-1-15-0	13	0-8-12-9	14	0-11-8-7
Holdibadi	3	0-4-11-4	15	0-13-17-0	17	1-10-18-9
Abcer Sudr	2	0-10-14-11	42	1-8-14-14	60	3-7-9-2
Adam	3	0-3-12-4	10	0-15-4-3	15	1-15-2-0
Cooddy	1	0-2-0-0	1	0-0-10-4	9	6-5-7-5
Bagdabary	16	1-4-0-0	67	2-12-10-3	59	5-0-5-2
Total ground alienated for each post		5-11-4-2		24-0-17-3		35-8-6-15

³⁴Source: Computed from Enclosure No. 14. Progs Committee of Circuit at Rungpur 16th December 1772.

[contd] .

Name of the Pergunnah	Designation		Designation		Designation	
	Sirdar		Pyche		Halmanjee	
	Total no. of servants	Lands given B-K-Ch-A	Total no. of servants	Lands given B-K-Ch-A	Total no. of servants	Lands given B-k-Ch-A
Futtypore 14 As.	6	0-3-7-330	15-15-6-3	120	8-17-10-10	
Futtypore 2 As.	6	0-3-11-4	19	6-10-11-2	102	2-7-19-3
Chargyhat Colcha	30	2-5-7-9	80	4-9-14-11	180	11-4-2-120
Chargyhat Mushcoot	26		57		180	
Woodassey	-	-	2	1-3-0-0	20	0-9-6-14
Goriado	-	-	2	0-9-0-0	17	0-5-7-11
Tepah	6	0-14-8-10	28	0-12-9-6	80	2-2-17-3
Banit	2	0-1-10-0	6	1-17-0-0	30	0-12-5-0
Caeknah	20	1-3-13-14	80	27-4-8-0	216	8-10-9-0
Bamandanga	2	0-0-15-0	14	4-6-0-0	127	3-12-8-7
Pauga	1	0-11-9-15	29	10-15-14-0	-	0-1-17-6
Somnarayan	10	0-11-9-15	22	0-10-13-11	80	2-8-3-4
Chandro Kona	2	0-1-8-10	10	0-6-14-9	60	1-10-16-4
Barbuti	5	0-4-4-9	9	0-4-5-12	29	0-11-18-11
Holdibadi	11	0-8-5-5	46	1-6-5-6	50	1-12-7-2
Abcer Sudr	15	0-12-6-10	50	1-12-5-8	100	3-5-0-11
Adam	12	0-10-7-2	25	1-10-15-3	70	1-4-3-9
Coaddy	60	6-4-16-11	300	24-1-0-5 $\frac{1}{2}$	400	26-8-18-6
Bagdabary	30	1-11-5-7	50	1-9-10-14	160	6-2-3-7
Total ground alienated for each post		16-1-0*1		37-15-9-15 $\frac{1}{2}$		77-11-13-2

[contd]

Name of the Pergunnah	Designation Hurryda		Designation Poddar		Total no. of servants in each pgn. appointed for collection of revenue
	Total no. of servants	Lands given	Total no. of servants	Lands given	
		B-K-Ch-A		B-K-Ch-A	
Futtypore 14 As.	-	-	-	Data not given	124
Futtypore 2 As.	7	0-2-10-15	-	-	210
Chargyhat Colcha	-	-	1	-	433
Chargyhat Mushcoot	-	-	1	-	364
Woodasseey	-	-	-	-	33
Goriado	3	0-1-0-8	-	-	33
Tepah	20	0-10-2-14	-	-	165
Banit	4	0-1-18-0	-	-	68
Caeknah	43	1-4-17-3	-	-	605
Bamandanga	11	0-4-3-0	-	-	250
Pauga	6	-	-	-	43
Somnarayan	11	0-3-18-0	-	-	204
Chandro Kona	-	-	-	-	111
Barbuti	0	0-2-7-0	1	-	79
Holdibadi	-	-	-	-	142
Abcer Sudr	-	-	-	-	269
Adam	-	-	-	-	135
Cooddy	53	3-0-11-5 $\frac{1}{2}$	-	-	-
Bagdabary	-	-	-	-	382
Total ground alienated for each post		5-15-9-19 $\frac{1}{2}$			4474



**PARTICULARS OF CHAKERAN ZAMIN GIVEN TO THE SEVERAL SERVANTS OF THE FOLLOWING
PERGUNNAHS OF EDRACPORE IN LIEU OF WAGES A**

Pergunnahs	Sirdars and Pykes stationed in Pergunnahs	Poddars or Shroffs for examining rupees	Peons Stationed in the villages	Daftary in the Pergunnah Cutcherry	Kist Mutgares or Servants	Bearers
Cass Taluk	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hoonchy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Cossy	-	-	-	-	-	48''0
Chorchoy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Soochargoosary	-	-	-	-	-	40''0
Bogdoar	-	-	-	-	-	-
Palladoosy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ketloll	-	-	-	-	-	39''10
Azempore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Comardo	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chatnagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Malgoom Islampore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Edrakpore	-	-	-	-	-	11''12
Moaktipore	-	-	-	-	-	131''8
Belgant	-	-	-	-	-	60''
Bazetpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coharpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bogleanpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sonatolah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Moispore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Sengariah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Beenopore	-	-	-	-	16''11	-

[continued]

Pergunnahs	Sirdars and Pykes stationed in Pergunnahs	Poddars or Shroffs for examining rupees	Peons Stationed in the villages	Daftary in the Pergunnah Cutcherry	Kist Mutgares or Servants	Bearers
Ganganagore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Coosy	-	-	-	-	-	77''3
Lolbarry	-	-	-	-	-	-
Woorigassy	-	-	-	-	-	-
Mettah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Hayatpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Camnhow	-	-	-	-	-	-
Ramchunderpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Loarlund	-	-	-	-	-	-
Barat	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Bycantpore small	-	-	-	-	-	-
Chearygong	-	-	-	-	-	-
Dormodospore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Fullbarry	-	-	-	-	-	81''8
Sontala	-	-	-	-	-	42''13
Boyjagher	-	-	-	-	-	47''3
Sunearre	-	-	-	-	-	40''
Bardore	-	-	-	-	-	-
Noontollah	-	-	-	-	-	-
Torophigh Bezole	182''16	-	-	-	-	-
Total Lands	3450''5	9''41	46''	8''5	16''11	618''17

[Continued]

Pergunnahs	Harry	Kurramcharis or men who collect rents	Mundals or headmen of the villages	Kotwals or Men who take force of the country	Pykes stationed at Muffassil	Total amount of lands given to the servants of the Rajah
Cass Taluk	-	-	327''6	232''7	-	816''8
Hoonchy	-	-	-	79''19	-	79''19
Cossy	14''	-	70''11	358''4	-	1179''16
Chorchoy	-	-	70''19	297''13	137''16	1097''5
Soochargoosary	3''14	-	497''10	209''8	-	1164''0
Bogdoar	14''	-	-	31''0	-	756''
Palladossy	-	-	-	47''0	-	398''0
Ketlioll	3''	76''16	49''17	218''15	-	959''17
Azempore	-	-	10''0	41''12	-	150''19
Comardo	-	56''19	66''4	-	-	123''3
Chatnagore	-	63''16	-	114''8	-	322''18
Malgoom Islampore	-	12''13	-	98''11	-	902''1
Edrakpore	-	-	130''0	177''12	-	512''2
Moaktipore	-	-	345''13	229''15	-	1050''8
Belgani	-	-	488''17	198''7	-	1255''7
Bazetpore	-	1''2	-	207''8	114''11	290''9
Coharpore	-	-	256''16	200''13	155''2	691''9
Bogleanpore	-	71''3	195''15	208''2	-	1208''13
Sonatolah	-	85''13	209''11	233''17	60''19	1087''17
Moispore	-	-	115''6	112''3	14''2	284''5
Sengariah	-	-	43''3	62''18	-	260''7
Besnopore	-	114''2	49''11	62''7	-	150''7

[Continued]

Pergunnahs	Harry	Kurruncharis or men who collect rents	Mundals or headmen of the villages	Kotwals or Men who take force of the country	Pykes stationed at Muffassil	Total amount of lands given to the servants of the Rajah
Ganganagore	-	96''0	184''2	17''13	150''15	577''19
Coosy	-	-	43''	288''13	-	478''10
Lolbarry	-	35''17	399''7	371''13	-	1748''1
Woarigassy	-	55''13	60''0	26619	97''17	696''3
Mettah	-	-	233''13	239''11	-	1245''18
Hayatpore	-	-	97''13	105''9	-	274''11
Camnhow	-	-	55''14	97''13	-	248''11
Ramchunderpore	-	-	54''5	65''13	188''16	161''0
Loarlund	-	-	265''18	202''13	-	657''7
Barat	-	-	20''18	25''13	-	46''11
Bycantpore	-	-	157''5	199''18	-	357''3
Bycantpore small	-	-	97''13	105''19	-	203''12
Chearygong	-	-	87''8	45''8	-	92''1
Dormodospore	-	-	43''3	40''11	-	83''14
Fullbarry	-	-	120''8	116''13	-	430''18
Sontala	-	9''0	78''9	67''5	-	347''12
Boyjagher	-	-	53''12	39''9	-	306''4
Suneare	5''0	-	34''15	180''7	-	505''12
Bardore	-	-	77''13	95''13	-	73''6
Noontollah	-	-	45''0	57''12	-	102''12
Torophigh Bezole	-	70''0	817''14	2209''14	-	6855''9
Total Lands	74''14	648''14	5964''11	8268''8	919''16	30580''13

In the eighteenth century interprofessional mobility was quite common among the service gentry. A typical example of upward professional mobility is characterized in the case of Brijmohan Bose ostensibly a *Kayasth*³⁵. Having risen from the post of *darogha* of Ramnagar Haut, to *aumil* and *tehsildar* of the *Khass Taaluq* in 1175 (1768- 79), he also acted as *gumoshta* of Mr. Rookes, the supervisor of Dinajpur. Later he bribed the *Mutsuddi* and *munshi* of Mr. Lawrell the next supervisor to procure for himself the post of *peshkar* on the part of the supervisor to the Dinajpur Raj. He was also ready to pay a kickback of S. R. 5000 to the *muttsuddi* to procure a *tahud* for *sezawalship* of the *pergunnahs* attached to the supervisorship. This is an eye catching example of the intricate mechanism by which the lower and middle class service elites procured their position and status in early colonial Bengal. On the other hand we find old service tenures being systematically engulfed by the *zamindari* service elite, even if held by *Huzori sanad*. An example can be cited from Dinajpur³⁶. A grant was made to Mir Syed Ali an old servant by a *parwana* of Nawab Jaffer Ali Khan. in the *pergunnah* of Haveli Pinjara. The estimated income of this tenure was rupees hundred per mensem. We find a petition to the Board of Revenue by one of his descendants, the widow of Mr. Muhammad Hussain, That Ramkan Ray the *naib* of the *zamindar* is bent upon to make a claim on that tenure.

Most of the revenue officials obtained considerable remission on their non- service

³⁵The information about this man is available in letter of H. Cottrell, 4th Oct. 1771 to John Cartier, Progs. CCRM dt. 8th Feb. 1772.

³⁶Ramsbothum *op. cit* p 109.

holdings by virtue of their position. This was not confined to the higher rungs alone. The service tenurial grants fostered the formation of a localized elite whose social function placed them definitely above the actual cultivators. By virtue of their skill, literacy and caste status they occupied crucial position in either the *zamindari* administration or in the non- official realm by performing various social functions professionally i.e. as a priest or as physician. Among the local revenue officials the *karmachari* (who looked after the general management of rent collection) the *patwari* (who kept the account) and the *Halsanah* (who was employed in measuring and marking out the ground possessed by each *raiyat* distributing new lands, and gather the *zamindars'* share of the crop in case of rent in kind) were of acute importance³⁷. These posts were hereditary irrespective of any change in their immediate superiors. Naturally with the kind of knowledge they had it was very easy to manipulate the records to fit their own wishes. Exempting their own holdings from rent on the pretext that they had fallen out of cultivation, was as easy as striking off its *jumma* from the rent roll. These intermediaries were therefore able to corner a large portion of the available surplus. These strata held between 10.6% to 46.95% of the assessed value of different *zamindaris*³⁸. The real surplus accrued by them tend to be greater because their own holdings were either undervalued or revenue-free. Moreover they received indirect benefit from the collection, as about 20%

³⁷Rajat Dutt, "Some aspect of Agrarian system of Bengal in late eighteenth century", Unpublished MPhil. Dissertation JNU 1981 pp 34- 35.

³⁸Rajat Dutt *op. cit* pp 34- 35.

of the state's share was allowed to remain in the localities as *muffassil serenjami* charges³⁹ of this *zamindari*'s share was seven percent which left the intermediaries to the rest⁴⁰. The concentration of these officials was below the *pergunnah* level, which allowed them to indulge in a free manipulation of accounts⁴¹. An example from Dinajpur highlights the universal practice of the *Patwaris* of conniving at the reduction of the *muffassil jumma*⁴². The *raiyat* frequently relinquished his land every year and held off from cultivation till the superior collectors solicit them at a lower rent than the preceding year, and a patta granted at accordingly. These patta is called *Cheet farakh* in local dialect. At the approach of the harvest, however, his crop was indiscriminately attached, at the instance of the *Patwari*, reducing the *raiyat* to have no other alternative but to agree to the terms upon which he originally held the tenure. But the collection of the rent would be shown as specified in the *Cheet farakh*. These deceitful practice was not only the cause of frequent desertion by peasants but produced a chain of fraud which the able management could not detect. The middle- rung revenue elite, if the occasion permitted, were keen to take the *zamindar* for a ride. The *wazib- ul- urz* on behalf of Birprasad Choudhuri (minor) son of Nurahari Choudhury (deceased) may be cited as an example⁴³. By

³⁹Firminger (ed.) *Op. Cit* p 267.

⁴⁰Rajat Dutt, *Op. cit* p 35.

⁴¹*Ibid.* p 5.

⁴²*Ibid.* p 5.

⁴³Midnapur Collectorate Records. Enclosure to letter dt. 10th July 1783 to the *Khalsa* Department.

inheritance the ten year old Birprasad Choudhuri was the *Sadr Choudhuri* of Chakla Midhapur and *zamindar* of *pergunnah* Kurrickpur (Kharagpur), Kedar and tuppah Bulrampur. Balram Bhumia, the *Gumoshta* of *pergunnah* Kedar seized the office of the *niab* of *Sadr Choudhuri* by force. Since the *Sadr Choudhuri* himself was a minor. He attached the *russoom dustoor* and *nankar* of the infant Raja. Not only that he made *benami* (fictitious) free holding tenures for himself by granting *sanad* in the name of Chinu Ghosh and several others. for large tracts of *malguzari* lands under the nomination of *mahatran* tenures⁴⁴.

The lucrateness of revenue- free holdings was considerable. Probably this was the reason why we find in Nadia small *zamindars* who held *chakran* lands probably in lieu of some other services (other than revenue collection)⁴⁵. Old *zamindars*, inspite of their perquisites used their caste status to obtain revenue free holdings. The Brahman Maharaja Krishna Chandra of Nadia handed over to his second wife and son Sambhu Chandra (not the heir apparent) fifteen grants under the denomination

⁴⁴The word *mahatran* is probably a comparative degree of the adjective *mahat* (great) in *sanskrit*. *mahattara* means greater or superior and the suffix 'un' being used for plural, involving the sense 'to a superior person'. (*Dwitiya bivakti karmokarak*). R. S. Sharma 'Social Change in Early medieval India' (mimeographed) tells us of a class of village headmen in early medieval India called *mahattaras*. *Mahattaran* might imply grants made to them. Ranjit Sen *Economics of Revenue Maximization in Bengal 1757- 1793* p 69. said that in Midnapur rent free lands were granted by all senior officers of revenue collection. But he unfortunately do not cite any documentary evidence.

⁴⁵Jacob Rider, Supervisor's Statement of the *hust- o- bad* of Nadia in 1772 in Progs. Committee of Circuit Nadia and Kassimbazar (Vol. I- III) pp 77 ff

of *Britti*, *Brahmottar* and *Devottar* which comprised 20,000 *Bighas*⁴⁶. In Rajshahi *Devottar* lands, valued at about one lakh rupees (at the rate of nine annas per *Bigha* was handed over to Shibnath, younger son of Raja Ramkrishna⁴⁷. We can thus assume that while the *zamindari* and its own perquisites passed down according to the laws of primogeniture, provisions for younger sons were made through transfers of these rent free holdings, the original purpose of which, as we have already discussed, were altogether different.

Such was the system of interception of revenue by the intermediary classes claiming service status. They varied from nearest relations and allies of the *zamindars*, to their lowest agents who maintained immediate contact with the primary producers. The English policy of economizing the expenses of collection and maximization of revenue put a curb on their accustomed capacity.

⁴⁶*Ibid.*

⁴⁷C. Palit, *Tensions in Rural Bengal*, p 30.

Chapter 4

THE FAMINE AND CONSEQUENCES

The famine of 1769- 70 popularly known as the *Chiatwarer Manvantar* since it happened in the Bengali year 1176, had such serious consequences for Bengal agriculture and population that there should be little need for justifying a chapter being devoted to it. Much had been written about this famine even since Bankimchandra set his classic novel *Anandamath* in the background of this famine, and even before, when Hunter drew a gruesome picture of it in his *Annals of Rural Bengal*¹.

¹The causes and consequence of the famine is discussed in detail by N. K. Sinha *Economic History of Bengal* Vol. II, Chapter 3. '*Chiawattarer Mananvantar*' *Itihas* Vol. 9 and 10.

Hunter *Annals of Rural Bengal* pp 19ff.

Amartya Sen *Poverty and Famines*.

Rajat Dutt, 'Causation of Dearth and Famine in late 18th Century Bengal' *SOAS Occasional Paper III*.

Urmita Roy " Implication of Food Shortages in the Economy of late Eighteenth Century Bengal", M. Phil. Dissertation (Unpublished) 1992, Burdwan University.

The contemporary descriptions of the famine showed that failure of rains was its immediate cause. Around seventeen sixty nine Reza Khan had reported to Verelst about the extreme dryness of the season². Since then the drought continued destroying the autumn harvest and the ruining the prospect of the winter one. The author of *Seir Ul Muta- Qherin* also said that there was not a drop of rain in Bengal and Bihar in 1183 Al- Hijri (1769- 70)³.

In the *Letter Copy Book of the Resident at Durbar* we are told of the news favouring of *muffassil* about the ravages of the drought.

“The drought with which it hath pleased God to visit this and the neighbouring districts in the course of the last twelve months is such as by all accounts has not happened in the century”, wrote one of them⁴. “...no produce whatever has arisen from the budding (Sic) ... *Khureej* harvest was completely burnt” wrote another⁵.

The famine is described for us during its very course by Nanda Dulal Ray who lived in the village of KhandoKosh in the then Bardhaman⁶. He was a petty transcriber of religious ballads. The piece was written around the summer of 1177 i.e. 1771. He writes,

“It is the year eleven hundred and seventy- six. There occurred a great famine.

²Reza Khanto Verelst CPC II, Letter no. 1596, dt. 18th Sept. 1769.

³Seir Ul Muta- Qherin Ms. folio 795.

⁴LCB Letter no. 36, 28th March 1770. Supervisor of Rajmahal to Resident

⁵*Ibid.*, 13th Jan. 1770

⁶The village KhandaKosh is situated near the south- west bank of river Damodar on the Road to Arambag Town.

There was drought. Crops failed only in the southern part of the province and in some marsh land areas there was scanty rain and hence a little crop was raised thereby

Price of rice soared to twelve *seer* per rupee when only six and half *pon* (a measurement) rice was given as one *seer*. The oil sold at two and half *seer* per rupee. Only one *seer* salt was available for a rupee. Pulse was sold at 11 *seer* a rupee. There was no vegetable or green sprouts (*Saak*). Almost nothing is available. A person aged seventy years says that he has not heard about this sort of calamity. Men died in huge numbers. Even the rich can not afford to cook meals (lit. to put the handi on the oven). The massive devastation went on till the month of Bhadro (August- September 1771) of 1177. But there was nothing left of rest of the (monsoonal) season (to cultivate) By Sravana (July- August) the price (of rice) had further soared to only 4 *seer* a rupee. People perished in huge numbers in the great famine ...”⁷.

The severity of the famine and its consequent food price hike is borne out by this evidence. As this author said: “ human memory did not have any record of such severe catastrophe. ”⁸.

Within the span of one year from 1176 to the *Sravana* (mid July to mid August)

⁷English translation of the Colophon (Pushpika) of a transcript of *Chandimangal Kabya*. Viswabharati Bengali Ms no. 1580. The date of completion of the transcript is 27th Jaishtha 1177 which means it was an eye witness report.

One *seer* is one- fortieth part of a maund.

⁸*Ibid*.

of 1177. The price of rice, the staple food, rose from 12 *seer* a rupee (which in itself was a crisis- year price) to 4 *seer* a rupee i.e. by three times. If this was the picture of Bardhaman (the Supervisor of Rungpur wrote to the Resident at Durbar in August 1770. that in Bhabanigunge (District Rajshahi) "which was the greatest grain mart under the Rungpur Collectorship" the coarsest paddy sells at 8 to 10 *seer* a rupee⁹.

The famine was then partly precipitated by food availability decline due to failure of the people to buy the food at an unaffordable price¹⁰.

The decline in food production led to holding and manipulation, which further restricted the effective supply. Comte De Modave, a french man who visited India in 1773- 76, observed that it was the unlimited exports that exposed Bengal to such terrible famine¹¹. A very candid letter from the Resident to the Supervisor of Birbhum, Charles Stuart (written as early as May 1770) confirms the contention of governmental hoarding for military garrison. The Resident wrote "As the present

⁹LCB Letter no. 17 dt. 7th August 1770.

¹⁰For a theoretical perspective see Amartya Sen, *Op. Cit* where he develops the theme of failure of exchange entitlements (that bundle of goods which an owner can sell or exchange in lieu of food, is his exchange entitlement). The famine occurs when these entitlements fail to fetch the price by which one can buy the food.

The entitlement approach however needs to be supported by empirical evidences. Any information about the lowering of mortgage/ sale rates of entitlements, such as plough, utensils, cattle or even land is yet to be unearthed regarding the famine in question.

¹¹"... les exportation illimites out quelquefois expose le Bengale a de rudes famines".

J. Deloche (ed.) *Voyage en Inde Du Comte De Modave*, p 63.

prospect of the approaching harvest is very unfavourable . . . I am alarmed lest sufficient grains should not be collected to answer the high demands absolutely necessary to troops.¹² If the Company was responsible for an early diversion of supplies, the *nizamat* officials were equally responsible for failure to stop hoarding and export in the high days of the drought. In August 1770, the Supervisor of Rungpur reported that the merchants were exporting grains very fast. Shitab Ray tried to bring grain supplies from Benaras and regulate its price, to give some relief to the people in Azimabad (Patna). Reza Khan out of charity fed the poor. Some English and other European gentlemen of Murshidabad followed suit. But these measures were too meagre to alleviate the distress¹³. The actuality of the situation was that in Murshidabad there was a tendency by important subordinate officials and persons close to Reza Khan like Raja Amrik Singh to direct the supplies as and when these came by boat, engrossing for their personal interests¹⁴. English officers from the *Muffassil* wanted orders to punish the monopolisers and were aware of large hoarding. The issue was however not pressed by the Resident for obvious reasons¹⁵.

Huzarimall, a grain merchant of Murshidabad, complained that Reza Khan at the very height of famine stopped merchant boat loaded with and other provisions bound for Murshidabad and forcibly purchased from them rice at 25- 30 *seer* per

¹²LCB folio 118, Letter issued no. 1, To Charles Stuart, Supervisor, Birbhum, dt. 28th May 1770.

¹³*Ser Ul Muta qherin* p 793.

¹⁴*Ibid.* p 794.

¹⁵LCB, Letter received no. 1, dt. 24th April 1770.

rupee. It was later retailed out at 3- 4 *seer* per rupee. Yet for these execrable deeds he was winked at by the superior power¹⁶. According to Nand Kumar, the Khan sent his agents to the *ganjes* in Dacca, Jessore and Purnea even to seize seed grain and bring it to his personal market at Bhagwanpur. He and his subordinates sold rice for 3- 4 *seer* per rupee which was brought at a rupee per maund. The deputy Nawab also forcibly levied and collected large sum of money from Rajshahi to recover his apparent losses in rice trade¹⁷. However Nand Kumar's allegations were doubted by the Committee of Secrecy as his rivalry with the Khan was well known¹⁸. The grain Merchants at Bhagwangola in Murshidabad, complained of forcible attaching of stock piled grains, or intimidating traders to sell at dictated price, while trader of Dacca, Dinajpur and Purnea were buying cheap and selling at inflated prices¹⁹.

While the aptitude for quick profit was the guiding force to *Nizamat* officials, the diversion of grains from Bakharganj and Chittagong (Eastern Bengal being out of the spell of the drought), for military garrison to Munghyr, Berhampur etc. added to the misery of the people²⁰. With the first symptoms of drought, the Company responded

¹⁶Letter of Huzurimall to Company, 10th October 1770. B. M. Ad. Mss. 29132 folio 380; cited by Rajat Dutt "Subsistence Crisis, Markets and Merchants in Late Eighteenth Century Bengal" *Studies in History* 10, 1. 1994 p 90.

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸Report of the Committee of Secrecy to Hastings, 28th August 1771, Francis Mss. Eur. 28. folios 99- 101. 10R; cited in *Ibid.*

¹⁹Secret Consultations, 22nd February, 7th April, 14th April, 5th May, 10th May, 14th May 1773 10R; cited in the *Ibid.*

²⁰Select Committee Progs. Secret Consultation 24th December 1770.

by stock piling for six months. The thought of providing any relief to the affected, was subsidiary to the needs of army supply as well as revenue collections.

Rajat Dutt thinks that Reza Khan was basically trying to save Murshidabad by keeping the lines of supply to the city under desperate circumstances, and was forced to adopt coercive tactics that was resented by local traders. According to him the complaints against Reza Khan show the structure bases of tension between the state and the merchants as official intrusion was intolerable for the traders in a market of supply scarcity²¹.

Scarcity tended to increase rural demand as producers now became net consumers of grain. This is not to say that under relatively normal circumstances they were self sufficient. But their dependence on the merchants were intensified in times of scarcity. It was thus an artificial famine, as Hastings argued in 1783:

“the first want was artificial proceeding from the expectation of a real want and from the natural inducement which it offered to the dealers in grains to withhold it from the market in the hopes of deriving a larger profit and this ... which drove the proprietors into the destructive expedients for hoarding ... prevailed as the principal cause of the famine which ensued ...”²². Interestingly Hastings laid the blame on the merchants’ greed, but ignores the allegations that the Company’s officials also profiteered during the dearth.

²¹ *OP. Cit*

²² Minute of Hastings to the Council, 20th November 1773. Progs. GG in Council. Also cited by Rajat Dutt *Op. Cit.*, p 94.

Though the spatial distribution of the famine was not as destructive in all parts of Western Bengal, and eastern Bengal was virtually left unscathed, yet the spot price of grain in unaffected or little affected areas also showed a rising trend, as soon as the drought forced prices to rise abnormally in core area i.e. Burdwan, Birbhum, Murshidabad, Rajshahi, Rungpur, Purnea and other parts of Bihar. This was because merchants from Hughli, Burdwan and Birbhum carried off whatever was available in the marts of Midnapur²³. This aptitude for gulping the market reserve can be best illustrated by the fact that there was a phenomenal rise in the food prices in the country side. The result was a flow of highly priced grain from urban to rural areas at the height of the famine. The *Letter Copy Book* of the *Résident at Durbar of Murshidabad* gave ample evidence grain flow from Murshidabad to villages in Rajshahi and from Govindaganj, the principal mart in Rungpur, to its remote area. Ironically the severity of famine would have been far short lived if the artificial crisis was not precipitated at the very signs of early drought.

Rajat Dutt is of opinion, that the amount of grain siphoned by the Company in either official or private capacity, was an inconsequential proportion of even the restricted harvest of the famine days, as it was less than even half of the average yield per *pergunnah* in normal years. It was the merchants who controlled the per capita food availability at localized level. It is they who had the power to escalate

²³Firminger (ed.) *Midnapur District Records* Vol 4, p 53. Letter dt. 7th March 1771

the prices even in direct contravention of the will of the state's machinery²⁴. He had not only absolved the colonial government of its motivated designs, but had also given benefit of doubt to Reza Khan by saying that he allowed the country to perish but tried to save the capital. Basically Dutt's contention is that the famine was the outcome of particular situations operating in a commercial economy and "it was precisely this commercialisation which influenced the availability or absence of food in the province"²⁵. However, Dutt tends to neglect the influence of the new colonial set up on the revenue apparatus, and the rigidity of their revenue collection mechanism which not only influenced motivations of artificial scarcity and consequent price rise during natural calamities but also pushed down the value of the 'exchange entitlements' of the common man, who as we have already seen, generally belonged to the subsistence sector or even below that.

This would be amply clear if we analyse the impact of this catastrophe on the rural agrarian set up. Let us keep in mind Bankim's *Anandamath* which begin with the appalling spectre of death and flight in the wake of the famine. Hunter had also drawn an equally terrible picture.

Regarding demographic loss, Hunter had given us an estimate of almost one-third of the population, as against Cornwallis' estimate of one-fifth and Mackintosh Jones' one-sixth. The highest estimate was the most contemporary one, that of

²⁴Rajat Dutt, "Rural Bengal, Social Structure and Agrarian Economy in Late Eighteenth Century" Unpublished Ph. D. Thesis, University of London 1990 p 260.

²⁵Rajat Dutt *Op. Cit. Studies in History* 10, 1, 1994 p 103.

Comte De Modave, who observed that this horrible famine consumed more than two millions i.e. half the population²⁶.

Kingsley Devis has an interesting proposition that since most perished were generally old or infants, the population could normalize itself within a few decades²⁷. However, even if we do not (and we can not) test the validity of this conjecture by the actual evidences, it would logically appear that the general adult or teenage population were thoroughly emaciated to have longevity of life or normal procreation rate. The result ofcourse was great labour scarcity.

The effects of the famine would have been cushioned, if the Company's government had relinquished some of its fiscal demands. Instead, however the collectors of Burdwan and Midnapur- Jelassore were congratulated for collecting without recouring to any deficit balance²⁸. In other parts of their territory, the Company's government forced to squeeze out as much as they could from the emaciated peasantry. From most of the mufassil the general cry was that the *zamindars* were unable to pay balance due to death and desertion by the *raiya*²⁹. There were also

²⁶Hunter, *Op. Cit* p 20.

Cornwallis' minute of 18th June 1789 Appendix to Firminger (ed.) 5th Report Vol II

M. Jones, *Hastings in Bengal* p 256- 57

I. Deloche (ed.) *Op. Cit* p 63.

²⁷K.Davis, *Population of India and Pakistan* cited by B. B. Choudhuri, *Op. Cit* p 236.

²⁸*Midnapur District Records* Vol II p 152. Letter received 12th September 1769, Resident to James Alexander.

²⁹LCB no. 14/80. Letter received dt. 10th April 1770, Supervisor of Nadia to Resident.

Hunter Annals Appendix B, Burdwan Raj's Deputation to Council.

natural contraction in the area under cultivation. In Nadia those *raiyat* who previously cultivated 20 *bighas* were now unable to cultivate more than five *bhighas* for want of resources³⁰. But the valuation of the province appeared to be continued at the same rate without any deduction being granted, which implied that an extra severity was exercised on the *raiyat* to pay off³¹. In Dinajpur, Raja Baidyanath, the *zamindar*, reported that for want of seeds and implements of cultivation vast part of the *zamindari* was remaining waste³².

³⁰LCB Letter received 26/87, dt. 25th May 1771.

³¹Progs. Committee of Circuit to Nadia at Cossimbazar pp 69-70.

³²LCB Vol. I, Enclosure XXVI.

Some data collected by the Committee of Circuit (Kassimbazar) from Rajshahi District bear out the contemporary estimates of the grave demographic consequences of the famine³³.

Name of the Taraf	No. of Families 1175 (1768- 69)	Decrease in 1176 (1769- 70)		No. of families Remaining	Decrease in 1177 (1770- 71)		No. of Families Remaining
		By Death	By Desertion		By Death	By Desertion	
Rajdevpur	214	-	-	214	140	18	56
Panchkatta	114	-	-	114	73	5	36
Bhorla	364	45	-	319	148	40	131
Raipur	384	2	-	382	146 $\frac{2}{3}$	90 $\frac{1}{2}$	146 $\frac{2}{3}$
Total	1076	47	-	1029	507 $\frac{2}{3}$	153 $\frac{1}{2}$	369 $\frac{2}{3}$

³³Committee of Corcuit Kassimbazar. Enclosure to Progs. dt 25th August 1772.

From the above table it appears that the number of families declined by 66.63%. More than 50% ($507\frac{2}{3}$ out of 1076) of the families were known to have perished presumably within the *taraf* itself. Of the deserting families it cannot of course be known as to how many of them died of starvation, as they moved out, so that it is probable that total mortality was much above half possibly two-thirds. But the statistics from four other *tarafs* of the same district, show a far lower rate of mortality³⁴.

Pergunnah Luskerpur: Information on the families of mulberry cultivators. (The *tarafs* mentioned are specimen entries)

Name of Taraf	No. of families at the close of 1176 (April 1770)	Decrease by death in 1177 (1770- 71)	Deserted in 1177 (1770- 71)	Remaining
Olipur	286	31	38	217
Arranny	780	168	77	535
Rajpur	1141	163	107	87
Net figures for pergunnah Luskerpur	11875	325	209	11341

³⁴*Ibid.* folio 166- 167.

This gives a rate of 4.5% only for death and desertion, probably because as commercial crop growers these families were better subsisted to cope with the ravages of the drought. Yet in these very *tarafs* there was a shrinkage in the amount of land devoted for mulberry cultivation³⁵. Here we see fifty percent contraction of land in

Pergunnah Luskerpur: Information on the families of mulberry cultivators. (The *tarafs* mentioned are specimen entries.)

Name of Taraf	Land in Cultivation B.Y. 1176 (1760- 70)		Decrease due to death and desertion B.Y. 1177 (1770- 71)		Decrease in B.Y. 1178 (1771- 72)		Increase in B.Y. 1178 (1771- 72)		Net area under tillage	
	Bigha	Katha	Bigha	Katha	Bigha	Katha	Bigha	Katha	Bigha	Katha
Olipur	885	17	107	18	3	7	5	12	280	4
Arranny	1945	7	711	10	-	-	82	3	1317	-
Rajpur	1427	13	638	10	-	-	21	4	810	17
Net figure in Luskerpur	24499	9 75	13479	14 75	162	12	1013	7 5	12363	1

cultivation of one of the most important cash crops of Bengal.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

Silk worm rearers, who persumably did not have grain- lands, on whose produce to fall back upon also died and deserted in large numbers³⁶.

Statement showing decrease in the rearers of silk worms in Luskerpur pergunnah. (The tarafs are specimen entries).

Name of Taraf	No. of families at the close of B. Y. 1176 (1769- 70)	Decrease in 1177 B.Y. (1770- 71)		Total Decrease	Decrease in 1178 (1771- 72)	Increase in 1178 (1771- 72)	Total
		Death	Desertion				
Olipur	145	18	16	34	13	-	108
Rajpur	570	161	62	223	47	-	300
Arranny	771	144	67	211	107	7	460
Net figure for Luskerpur Pergunnah	9626	3286	1861	5147	812	635	4312

³⁶ *Ibid.* folio 186.

In neighbouring district of Nadia, the shrinkage in the area of cultivation was also evident. The *hust- o- bud* for the new farming system showed almost 50% shrinkage in cultivable lands. The amount of *malguzari* lands was 2178950 *Bighas* and 2 *Kathas*. But the cultivable lands agreed for, less waste 1010908 *Bighas* and 1 *Katha* was only 1168041 *Bigha* and 1 *Katha*. In other areas the jumma entered in the *hust- o- bud* would fall short, as the revenue of the deserted land was still kept on the rent roll. The amount of deficit from several *pergunnahs* of Bengal is listed in the next table.

Name of the Pergunnah	Jumma of Surveyed lands	Palataka or revenue of lands deserted but still kept on the rent roll	(2) as % of (1)
	(1)	(2)	
Twenty four (Sicca Rs.)	13,56,6461	62,688	46.2
Muhammad Aminpur (S R) (Hooghly)	2,76,062	13,582	49.1
Nadia (Ukhra)	15,85,798	2,42,842	15.31
Muhammad Sahi (S R)	38,04,09	38,744	10.18
Jessore (S R)	4,83,388	87,087	18.01
Hijli (Arcot Rupee)	2,94,945	28,275	9.58
Birbhum (S R)	11,44,825	4,11,615	35.9
Bishnupur (S R)	5,18,731	17,918	3.46
Pachete (Waziri Rs.)	1,54,423	49,673	32.1
Rokanpur (S R)	3,65,090	26,777	7.34
FatehSingh (Murshidabadi Sanat)	1,62,633	21,651	13.3
Jahangirnagar (S R)	3,63,570	1,04,629	28.1
Laskharpur (S R)	2,97,846	30,338	10.19
Rungpur (Naraijani Rs.)	16,50,655	3,71,675	22.52
Saidpur (S R)	1,19,580	19,191	16.04

The longterm impact of the famine was thus shrinkage in labour supply, followed by shrinkage in area under cultivation. It is in this context that the rural agrarian relations in post famine Bengal are analysed in the next chapter.

Chapter 5

AGRARIAN POST FAMINE

BENGAL: 1771-89

Post-famine Bengal posed a serious challenge to revenue authorities with two-thirds of province allegedly lying waste and almost one-third of the cultivating population either removed by death or no longer able to cultivate the land. Moreover during the seven years following the grant of the *Dewani*, the structure of the Dual government made the formulation of a unified land revenue policy almost impossible. In fact it was almost crippled by motivated and short-sighted actions as Ranajit Guha had pointed out¹. But it turned out that replacing the double government with assumption of full power by the Company would not improve matters.

Even before the region could limp back to normalcy the new system of auctioning the estates to the highest bidder was introduced. The basic aim was thus to enhance the revenue by any means without caring for the actual problems in the conditions

¹Ranajit Guha *Op. Cit* p 13.

of production.

The proposed enhancements in five years is given in the following tables. It shows that within the turn of a single year after the famine a nine- to eleven- percent increase in collection was expected, and the collection machinery was required to secure such an enhancement. In Dacca alone within a span of five years sixty percent appreciation was expected while in Baharband *pergunnah* of Rungpur it was high as eighty one percent. In the Rungpur collectorate, within a span of five years there was an annual increase of six^{teen} to eighty one percent of revenue. In Rangamatt^y *pergunnah* where the highest alteration is made, eighty one percent increase was affected in a single year.

General Abstract of Settlement of Lands in Dacca Collectorship²
B.Y. 1178- 83 (April 1771- 1777).

Place	Jumma revenue to be paid clear of all other charges							% of increase between 1178 B.Y. and 1183 B.Y.
	1178 B.Y. (1) S.R.	1179 B.Y. (2) S.R.	% of increase	1180 B.Y. (3) S.R.	1181 B.Y. (4) S.R.	1182 B.Y. (5) S.R.	1183 B.Y. (6) S.R.	
Dacca	2669698	2970503	111.27	3187058	3206387	3208472	3209514	157.7
Luckypur	326786	356470	109.08	356470	385922	386339	386339	118.22
Chittagong (payable at Sandwip)	63795	70457	110.43	77974	77974	77974	77974	122.23

Proposed Settlement of Lands in Rungpur Collectorship (1179-83 B Y.) April 1772 to April 1777³

Place	1179 (1)	1180 (2)	1181 (3)	1182 (4)	1183 (5)	(5) as % of (1)
Rungpur	894250	978856	1042186	1105381	1108381	123.95
Baharland	97802	97802	105303	112804	123575	126.35
Ranganathy	1711	3100	3100	3100	3100	181.18
Edrackpore	163922	174922	180422	180422	185922	113.42
Sultanpur	1853	2053	2153	2153	2153	116.3
Bobunpur	5562	5919	5919	5919	5919	106.41
Palassi bari	2981	3172	3172	3172	3172	106.4
Roleypar	3793	4036	4036	4036	4036	106.39
Sukchar	3263	3742	3742	3742	3742	114.68
Average Increase						121.67

Along with this increase in revenue, resumption of *Chakran* or service lands took place and the revenues were appended to the *kistbandee* of the farmers. The situation as stated in the petition from the farmers (*ijaradars*) of Haveli Pinjerah in the Dinajpur is worth quoting⁴. "The servants of these resumed (*chakeran*) lands had perished in the famine, and the grounds which have remained for some years uncultivated, became quite desolate and waste (and yield) no resources for the payment of revenue. Besides in our *Dowl patta* the revenues from several fines are included. These are now demanding from us over and above our rents. We could not exact fines of adultery from a desolate village By these unjust and exorbitant demand we are reduced to utmost distress became deeply indepted to merchants. Therefore unless these articles are abated we can not possibly pay the government revenue."

The increase in the revenue due to resumption of *Chakran* and *Baze zamin* purgunnahs under the Raja of Birbhum alone amounted to Rs. 12,3,575 dislodging

⁴Enoclosure to Progs. CCRM Progs. dt. 20th April 1772, *Arjee* dt. 13th April 1772.

12,649 servants family who were formally fed from these rents⁵. The increase in pressure of revenue and rigour in amount of the collection was coupled with the fact that the old *zamindars* position in the rural society was undetermined due to the intrusion of the *ijaradars*. Naturally old *zamindars* like Rani Bhowani of Natore or Raja Krishnachandra of Nadia tried to save their estates by taking the *ijara* themselves or some times in the name of their children and relations. In Nadia out of 45 lots given in *ijara* (consisting of big units comprising of 4 *pergunnahs* to small units one *taraf*) Sombhuchand, the younger son of the Raja, farmed 4 *pergunnahs* and three *tarafs*; Birchand, 1 *pargan*, chote rancee, 3 *taraf*; and Balaram Chatterjee, Sreebans Ray, Sadashiv Roy and Durpanarayan Roy all of the Raja's family, one *taraf* each. Only the six lots were farmed by the *Dewan*, *Munshi*, *Peshkar*, *Mohore*, *Cutcherry jamadar* and "doctor" of the Raja⁶. This phenomenon may have two opposite kinds of significance. Firstly it may be that the Rajah himself was offering bids in fictitious names (as was practised by Burdwan Raj before and after Permanent Settlement). Or it might be that land was changing hands, but was revenue service gentry who by their knowledge about the condition of the lots and *mehals* in the *Muffassil* and their power of manipulating the papers at the *sudder cutcherry* held an edge over the old *zamindars*.

⁵*Ibid.* Progs. dt. 8th October 1770.

⁶Mushidabad collectorate records — Settlement made in the Province of Nuddea by Muhammadamin it naib sezawal Dt. 22nd October, 1770

The same observation holds true regarding the Natore Raj, i.e. Rajsahi *jamindari* were the *Tili Dewan* Dayaram Ray carved a niche for himself and formed the *Dighapatia zamindari* at the cost of the Natore Raj⁷. Ratnalekha Ray contends that the change in proprietorship in *zamindaris* and *talucs*, the transfer of titles after 1793 was "merely on acceleration of a process which had been going on in a rapid pace from 1700"⁸. It is true that the acquisition of *zamindari* rights by the Brahman, Vaidya and Kayashtha officials of the Mughals and the Niabat was a time honoured practice exemplified in the creation of the *zamindari* of Nadea by Bhabananda Mazumdar, or the Natore Raj by Raghunanda Moitra. But it was in the post - famine Bengal that the enhanced revenue and rigours in the collection, left no breathing space for *zamindars* and the process especially accelerated. A petition of the Raja of Nadia, Dt. 23rd Dec., 1781 amply brings out the desperate attempt of the traditional *zamindars* to adjust to the new set up. The Raja claimed that the threat of the auction of parts of his lands was an insult "the like of which never happen to this *zamindari* which has been in the family for twelve generations If you settle the payment of my balance for a part in ready money and part to be carried into my settlement for the new year I shall be able to discharge the whole and preserve my credit I will give a responsible security ... if you can not accede to this terms, I beg my *masohara* may be withheld and my *khamar* and the like may be attached to pay the balance of the government I request that at

⁷Rajat Ray *Palashir Sharojantro O Sekaler Samaj* p 295ff

⁸Ratna Roy, *op. cit.* p 251

all events my lands, my name (title) and reputation may still remain my own". The committee of Revenue however deemed this proposals as " absolutely inadmissible and resolved they may be rejected⁹". In a like manner, the *zamindaris* of Rajshahi and Birbhum gradually collapsed. The *zamindars* also tried their level best to slid the burden enhanced exaction on the peasants through different means. The *raiya*s of Moinachur complained that the Raja's mother was charging an increase of Rs. 1 and Annas 8 above the assessment entered in their pattas¹⁰. Besides the *mangan* was increased from 1 anna 5 corra to 4 annas per rupee and though it was paid in kartik (autumn) it was again demanded in the next Baisakh. The *poolbundy* was also doubled and other *mathaoths* were re-imposed¹¹.

⁹Calcutta Com. Rev. Progs. 3rd March 1782, f 127-129, 130-132 Enclo.-Trans.

¹⁰PCR Burdwan Progs. Dt. 30th May 1774 Petition from Shyamdas and other *raiya*s of Moinachur (received on 28th May 1774)

¹¹Ibid see also the complains of Chaturbhuj Patra. Hari Patra. Midnapur collectorate Records, Letter received 30th May 1774

Side by side the rents of the *raiyats* also showed galoping increase as is seen in the petition from the *raiyats* of Meergodah in Jellesore ¹².

Distinction of the land	Rate Increase in (Rs. per bigha)		
	B.Y. 1172 (1166)	B.Y. 1178 (1772)	B.Y. 1181 (1776)
<i>Colla Basat Bary</i> (homestead)	3	4''8	13
<i>Colla Mahaba Fasli</i>	2''8	1''9''12	2''13
<i>Calla Fasli</i>	1''4	1.17	5
<i>Jall</i> (Marsh land)	2	4	10''10
<i>Jall patit</i> (Marshland waste)	1	2-10	4-10

¹²Ibid, Progs. dt. 23rd May 1774. Petition from the *raiyats* of Murgodah (received on 18th May 1774)

Other petitions which come from Midnapur also testified the increased exactions imposed on the *raiyats*. The *raiyats* of Bowanchor in the ^{taluk} of Gopi Satpatti complained that the *naibs* of the taluqdar acting in connivance with the *amin* Haro Dutt increase the rent by 2 annas per rupee over and above the *qarar patta*. They even sold the *raiyat*'s seeds for this. They imposed rent on waste lands and charged in the inferior soils the same rate as of the first grade. They also imposed a *mathaot* of 2 anna a year for every carriage - bullock possessed by a *raiyat*¹³.

In the Post-famine era the right of the *raiyats* was thus heavily affected. There was burden of *najay* and *jat patta* over and above other *abwabs* and *mathaots*. There were cesses levied on all resident cultivators for areas of the rent of those who had deserted and cultivable land lying fallow. This was levied to make up the due rent irrespective of the actual clauses. The old system, while not averse to physical torture, had largely protected the rights of the *Khud khast raiyats*. But now *raiyats* who did not perish in the famine were driven to a situation when they had to flee from their homestead to avoid these excesses. On the other hand the *zamindars* were at a loss: "where so much land lies waste and so few hands are left for cultivation, the peasant must be courted to undertake cultivation¹⁴". In this situation, migratory peasants had to be enticed by offers of rent rates lower than that levied on a resident *raiyat*. In Birbhum, for example, they paid fifty percent

¹³Ibid, Progs. dt. 6th June 1774. Petition from *raiyats* of Bowanchor, Jellesore (received on 1st June 1774)

¹⁴Minute of Philip Francis 5th November 1776; quoted in Hunter, *Annals* p 59

less *abwab* than the *Khud kasht*¹⁵. For the resident *raiyats*, their occupancy status became³ a curse. They had to pay higher rents than the 'non-resident' cultivators. The pretence of incapacity did not help due to the extortive cesses. Nor would they find migratory *raiyats* to offer helping hands because the latter were enticed directly by the *zamindars*. The *Pahi Kasht* were granted the same quality of land as enjoyed by the *Khud Kasht* but at a far lower rate. In Birbhum, the *Khud Kasht* had to pay Rs. 5 Annas 8 and 3 per *bigha* along with *abwabs* according to the rate of 1768. Whereas as the *Pahi Kasht* would pay only Rs. 4 as 8 per *bigha*¹⁶. Thus due to the drastic change in the land - man ratio precipitated by the famine, the privileges of the *Khud Kashts* were radically reversed. In every part of the *subah* there were cultivable waste lands called *loksan jot*. Under the peculiar conditions, the *Khud Kasht raiyat* from one region were attracted by the nominal rates as an incentive for desertion. Aditi Nag Choudhuri - Zilli had shown how the resident *raiyat* of depopulated districts like Birbhum, Burdwan and Nadia, emerged as *Pahi Kasht* elsewhere, and were welcome as reclaimers of soil and offered easier terms¹⁷. It was this situation which made Hunter remark that these were the people responsible for large scale desertion and formed the chief obstacle to *zamindars* realizing the revenue demand of the government¹⁸. Hunter apparently assumed that the famine

¹⁵Birbhum Collectorate Records. Letter Issued 16th April 1789; Particulars of *Pahi Kasht raiyats*

¹⁶*ibid* Letter Issued 16th August 1787

¹⁷Aditi Nag Choudhuri - Zilli, *Op. Cit* pp 43ff

¹⁸Hunter *Bengal Ms Records* Introduction (Historical Dissertation) p 58ff

changed the status of the resident *raiyats* who bettered their position and bargaining power vis a vis the *zamindars* by deserting the other areas as migratory *raiyats*. According to him, in post-famine Bengal, as in medieval Europe, desertion improved the condition of the peasantry¹⁹. He thought, however, to have distinguished between different strata of the peasantry. There were previously privileged *Khud Kasht raiyats* who owned their implements of production, who now as migratory peasants set to cultivate abandoned villages and succeeded in getting lower rates. They could and would desert if the rent was enhanced²⁰. But side by side there existed less privileged *pahi kasht* who were labourers who work with hired implements like cattle and plough. They found emmigration more difficult. The *khud kasht* who emerged as *pahi kasht* for lucrative rent terms are described in contemporary documents as *nijgaon* or *nijghari pahi kashts* as opposed to the *bazegaon pahi kashts*. The wealthy *khud kshashts* who were *mundols* in their commune controlled the migrating *pahi kashts*, in more senses than one. As money lenders they had enough power and remained more or less unscathed by this famine²¹. Both Ratnalekha Ray²² and Ranjan Gupta²³ think that the *zamindars* overburdened with revenue demands turned to this *mundols* who embarked upon reclaiming deserted

¹⁹*ibid*

²⁰GGC Minute of 12th November 1776. O.C.

²¹For *mundols* acting as money-lenders, see the chapter on peasants.

²²Ratna Ray *Op. Cit* pp 8ff.

²³Ranjan Gupta *Op. Cit* pp 38- 39.

villages and lands with their capital and man powers. They compelled the *zamindar* to grant them tenancies at low rates. The compulsion was the threat of desertion of the *raiyyat* they controlled. They even took the harvested crops with them on leaving for other districts.

Ray extended her observations about the bargaining power of wealthy *pahi kashts* to put forth the postulate, that the post- famine Bengal saw the rise of a class of rich peasants who usurped the power and control of the rural society from the *zamindars*. She used the term *jotedar* or 'lord of Soil' for them as opposed to *zamindar* or 'lord of the Territory'. She refers to this class as village oligarchs who hold actual control over the tillers²⁴. Ironically the concept of *jotedar* in the sense of a rich peasant can not be attributed to eighteenth century Bengal. Basically a *jote* in rural Bengal meant a field that can be plough by one pair of cattle and could be approximately equal to 15- 18 *bighas*²⁵. Hence technically a *jotedar* is at most middle peasant. It is only the fifties of the present century, after the *zamindari* abolition that the term *jotedar* assumed a semantic connotation equivalent to a landlord.

Ray did not also show how this so called village oligarchs were left with so much financial reserves even after the great famine, when the *zamindar* themselves had become greatly impoverished.

The basic problem in post- famine rural society was that the colonial government was not ready to accept a shrinkage in the revenue outflow to allow deserted lands

²⁴Ratna Ray *Op. Cit* p 8.

²⁵ *Report of the Land Revenue Commission in Bengal 1940.*

to be properly reclaimed. The *zamindars* wanted to entice the peasants to carry on cultivation, for otherwise they themselves could loose their rights and even for default. The traditional *zamindars* depended on their officials, *dewan*, *naib*, *gumoshta* or the *amla* for rent collection. This people had intricate knowledge about the quality of the soil and the harvest, as well as previous accounts and had a tendency to usurp part of the collection and pass the blames on the peasants. These members of the service gentry who in connivance with other officials also took to *ijaras* during the auction. The government whose only aim was to get the revenue, naturally sided with them. This is borne out in case of Birbhum.

Lala Ramnath the *zamindar's dewan* petitioned the government that the farmers and the rentiers had held payments since the *pahi kasht raiyat* had not payed their rents²⁶. The balances due were:

Pahi Kashts from Rajshahi	Rs. 9670 As. 8 to 9
Pahi Kashts from Burdwan	Rs. 7509 As. 12 to 1
Pahi Kashts from Murshidabad	15217 As. 17 to 1
Total	Rs. 32397 As. 5 to 1

The enhancement in the rent rate of the *Pahi kasht* was also exorbitant as shown in the following data from Birbhum.

District to which <i>Pahi kasht</i> belonged	Occupied land in Birbhum <i>Bigha</i>	<i>Jumma of</i> B.Y. 1192 (1785- 86) Rs.	<i>Jumma of</i> B.Y. 1195 (1788- 89) Rs.	Rate of increase in %
Rajshahi	19679	11846	18365	55.03
Murshidabad	30128	17524	29078	151.67
Burdwan	11759	6464	11454	77.19

²⁶BOR Progs. dt. 18th March 1790. Enclosure.

The Governor General in Council instructed the collector of Birbhum to ask the *zamindar* "to attach their (i.e. *raiyats*) crops²⁷". The *zamindar's dewan* went a step further and issued a *parwana* that those peasants who would not pay at the enhanced rates, would not only be debarred from cultivating the land but their ploughs will also be attached²⁸.

In the report of Muhammad Imam the *Amin* deputed to Rajshahi for investigating the claims of the *zamindar* of Birbhum upon *raiyat* residing in Rajshahi, it is stated that one Ram Chand Choudhuri, *amla* on behalf of *dewan* Lala Ramnath enhanced the *jummabundy* of the *pahi kashts raiyat* in such a manner that "where one rupee used to be paid, two and half rupees are now demanded²⁹" (i.e. one hundred and fifty percent increase). When the *raiyat* could not accede to this demand, the farmers collected the rents according to the rates (*nirickh* of the former year but inserted the enhanced amount in their account as balance unpaid. The *raiyat* of *mouza* Chaulchack revealed to the *Amin* that they were never told about this new *jummabundy* till the collection of 1195 B. Y. was almost closed³⁰. When the *gumostha* made the demand for an increase, they declared themselves unable to pay and revenue was accepted according to their *ekrar patta* and received given, for they

²⁷GGC Minute dt. 18th March 1790.

²⁸Birbhum Collectorate Records.

²⁹Birbhum Collectorate Records. Translated copy of the order of the *dewan* of the Raja of Birbhum dt. 28th *Jaishtha* 1195 i.e. 13th June 1790.

³⁰BOR Progs. dt. 30th April 1789. Enclosure to Progs. no. 35. Excerpts of letter dt. 6th April 1789 from Collector of Birbhum to BOR. General Abstract of *Pahi kasht Raiyats* of Birbhum.

could not be made to pay twice the same year³¹.

The same argument is put forth in the petition of *raiyat* Shaikh Khyrullah, Shaikh Monsah, Shaikh Razi of *mouza* Khuttia *pergunnah* Futtepur (Murshidabad) who were *pahi kasht* of Naupara in Birbhum, to the Collector of Murshidabad³².

When the Collector wanted to probe the accounts of the *amlas* himself, *Dewan* Lala Ramnath send a representation to the Board of Revenue charging the Collector "obstructing the execution of the purposes of the *amin's* deputation" i.e. collection of revenue³³.

From the above testimonials it is clear that the whole account of non- payment and desertion by the *pahi kasht* was a flimsy excuse offered by the *zamindari* officials to hide their malpractices of embezzling the accounts that led to default. Coupled with this was the fact that the Company's demand was too high and the *zamindari* had no resources to fall upon and could only meet it by rack- renting the *raiyat*.

Where do Ratnalekha Ray's wealthy village oligarchs fit in here? Were they actually *khud kasht raiyat* in their native villages migrating to other areas enamoured by the offers of low rates to reap a quick gain? Were they able, by threatening to remove the crop and go home, to obtain lower rant rates? The leading villages which opposed the B.Y. 1195 enhancement of rate by the Birbhum *zamindari* were

³¹BOR Progs. dt. 5th April 1790. Enclosure to letter from the Collector of Rajshahi.

³²Murshidabad Collectorate Records. Letters issued Collector to BOR lettr dt. 27th March 1790 enclosed translation of the petition of the *raiya*s.

³³Extract of the petition of Lala Ramnath BOR Progs. dt. 10th January 1790.

Bishenkunda and Hattia of *pergunnah* Futtepur, Murshidabad; Charya. Ekrapur and Karballav of Rajshahi and Danspulsal and Govindpur in Burdwan. Of these villages it was said: "The lands on which they reside are in general merely villages filled with houses without a *biga* of extra land attached to them They can neither graze their cattle or in many places obtain water drink, but through the favour of *zamindar* of the district"³⁴. Naturally enough they could not have exercised any bargaining power vis a vis the *zamindar*.

This seems enough to suggest a rescuiting of the hypothesis about wealthy *Pahi kasht* acquiring positions of advantage and authority. Ratnalekha Ray's contention is based mainly on Buchanan Hamilton's tracts on Rungpur (which covered Rungpur, Dinajpur and parts of Purnea)³⁵. But it also be borne in mind that Hamilton's survey was undertaken as late as 1807- 8, i.e nearly 15 years after the Permanent Settlement. Ray was thus simply interposing an early 19th century situation on the post- famine Bengal. Even Buchanan's description of the tenurial arrangements in the districts of Dinajpur and Rungpur circa 1808 never refers to the specific term *Jotedar*. Ray had also included the eastern Bengal under her hypothesis of rising *jotedar*. But eastern Bengal was not ravaged by famine and consequent depopulation to the extent endured by its western neighbours.

The other premise of the points of view noted above (Which came as a corollary

³⁴Particulars of *Pahi kasht raiyats* for B.Y. 1195, Birbhum Collectorate Records Letter issued 16th April 1790. Enclosure to BOR Misc. Progs. (19- 30th April 1790).

³⁵Rajat and Ratna Ray "Zamindar and Jotedar" in MAS 9,1 (1975) pp 85ff.

to the domination of the *jotedar*) was the marginality of the *zamindar* in the rural economy. The limited involvement of the *zamindar* in the actual organisation of the cultivation partly explained some limitation of their powers. However the notion that the *zamindari* was not a unit of production need not be overstressed (as Benoy Choudhury has rightly pointed out)³⁶. Though the famine had undoubtedly weakened the authority of *zamindar* by deranging their finances, the structure of rural society nevertheless ensured the durability of the *zamindari* as an institution³⁷. This partly explains the concerted attempts undertaken by the Company which culminated in the Permanent Settlement of 1793.

The perfidy of a section of bureaucracy at the same time, contributed immensely to the weakening of the *zamindari* control. They were not only the crucial cogs in the collection machinery, but performed a major role by overseeing production and by granting leases to the peasants. This was not only the *zamindari* officials but also those working in the Collectorates in various capacities, as also as *dewan* to the collector or as close confederates of the men in the central revenue authority (which was called by a variety of names, "Comptrolling Council", "Committee of Revenue", "Board of Revenue" etc.) who were among the actual gainers in the post famine Bengal.

³⁶B. B. Choudhuri "Rural Power Structure and Agricultural Productivity in Eastern India: 1757-1947" in M. Desai *et al.* (ed.) *Agrarian Power and Agricultural Productivity in South Asia* p 85.

³⁷Rajat Dutt "Agricultural Production, Social Participation and Domination in Late Eighteenth Century Bengal: Towards an Alternative Explanation", JPS 17, 1 (1989) p 73. Sirajul Islam *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal A study of its operation* pp 33- 40.

The rise of the new almost naturally implied the fall of the old. One of the classes disadvantaged in the post- famine were the land- grantees. They were compelled gradually to alienate lands, since they failed to cultivate them or pay revenue, once the *Baze zamin* a Regularization of 1788 came into vogue. Touching the plough for brahmin was insulting, if not defiling, as exemplified by derisively used word *Bamun Chasa* (cultivator brahmin) in local dialect. Naturally the option was to sell away the lands.

Who were the purchasers? In Birbhum the *Khosbash* (lands donated on some happy occasion). *Khairat* (charity) and *Brahmottar* lands were mainly purchased by the Surul Sarkar family of Bolpur. Starting his career as a *gumoshta* of the Company's resident at the *aurung* of Sonamukhi ensuring the Company's control over the weavers; Srinivas Sarkar, the founder of this family, transferred his abundant earnings into landed property³⁸. In Nadia, *mahattaran* and *devottar* lands in Ukhra belonging to the family of Ramsevak Singha and Haridev Singha, (officials of the Nadia Raj) came to be owned by the Narail *zamindari* of Jessore who in actuality was Kalishankar Ray, *naib dewan* of Raja Ramkanta of Rajshahi³⁹. Interestingly, Kalishankar was accused of embezzling the collection of the *zamindari* which led to

³⁸For details about the antedants of the Surul family and the way their status was ritualized through upward social mobility, see "Compradore to Zamindar, the making of the Surul Raj" by the author in *IHCP* 53rd Session, Warrangal.

³⁹*Devottar* and *Mahattaran* grant papers of Raja Krishnachandra in *Taidad* Registrar and Bundle no. 1 in Krishnagar Collectorate Record room Nadia. For details on the acquisition of the Narail family, see Sirajul Islam *Op. Cit* Appendix 6.

its dismemberment. Similarly, *Brahmottar* grants by Rani Bhowani in Belgachi at DihiSajjadpur to eminent scholars of ethics (*Nyayik*) of Navadwip, were all acquired by Ramlochan Banerjee and his nephews of Telenipara, Hooghly⁴⁰. Ramakanta, the brother of Ramlochan, was the *Dewan* of the Raja of Nadia and the Rani had complained that he was instrumental in the dismemberment of the Nadia *zamindari*⁴¹.

Other new entrants into the landed aristocracy included Hastings' close confederate Ganga Govinda Singha and Kanta Babu; Manikchand the right-hand man of the collector of Dinajpur; Jaynarayan Ghosal, nephew of Gokul Ghosal, *dewan* to Verelst in Chittagong; Darpanarayana Thakur *banian* of a member of the Committee of Revenue.

All these land transfers also implied a brisk opening of a land market. While the opening of land market was partly a result of distress sale of estates of defaulting *zamindars*, perpetuated by the high pitch of revenue demand and unprecedented strictness in collection, the willingness of moneyed persons to acquire land and old landed interest to increase the extent of their holdings provided the buyers. True, there were considerable imperfections in this land market especially due to the restricted intercourse between buyers and sellers, in the sense that private sale was not in vogue. Moreover, there was also the problem of effective possession, which the sale-deed did not necessarily confer; while failure to collect and pay up the revenue (due to the perfidy and resistance from old local interest) would mean

⁴⁰*Ibid.* Taidad Registrar Vol. I, II. Grants made by Rani Bhowani in B.Y. 1163- 71.

⁴¹Rani's Petition to Lord Moira, 15th January 1814, cited by Sirajul Islam *Op. Cit* p 174- 75.

loss of the right. The price trends prevalent during this period reflected this rather indecisive mood of the purchasers just as it also reflected the imperfections of the market itself with sales occurring only through auctions. Moreover, there were local manipulative influences on the land market which worked successfully till the middle of the nineteenth century which had been candidly detailed in the works of both B. B. Choudhuri and Ratnalekha Ray⁴².

From a survey of random land documents of pre- Permanent Settlement period it may be possible to study not only the growth of this land market and also the revenue realization in real terms by computing the price- revenue ratio⁴³. It would be seen here that since the purchasers did not expect large net income compared to the revenue (*jama*) even a 1:1 ratio for price: revenue seems to have been rare.

The documents explored cover the districts of Nadia, Burdwan, Madinipur (Midnapur/ Midnapur), Twenty four (*Bist- wa- chahr*) *pergunnah* and Dacca. The places concerned fall in the modern day districts of Murshidabad. Hooghly in West Bengal, Jessore in Bangladesh, Balasore in Orissa and Munger in Bihar.

The information which we gather from this documents concerns the amount of the revenue (*bakeya jama*) due, the price at which the lot was auctioned, the date of

⁴²B. B. Choudhuri "Land Market in Eastern India" *IESHR* 12/1,2 (1975) and *CEH* pp 97- 111.

Ratnalekha Ray *Op. Cit passim*

⁴³Persian *Sanad* Registrar XXI (WBSA) folio no. 24-222. Copies of deeds of possession granted by the Board of Revenue of the Company's government in India with approval from the Governor General in Council, to the auction purchases of *taluqs*, *mahals* and lots sold for arrear of revenue from 20th April 1789- 22nd April 1793.

auction according to Christian and Bengali eta; and the total jama of the land. Some times the name of the purchaser and the defaulter, the conditions to the auction (*shart- i- nilam*), the *iqrar* (agreemant) to pay the regular *quistbandi* (instalments) of revenue, and the actual right to be inverted with the purchaser are also provided. The evidence is tabulated district wise.

Dacca: *Chakla* Jehangirnagar *quismat pergunnah* Selimabad- the price of the land at the auction was 61.86% of the recorded *jumma*⁴⁴.

Nadia: The sales show an erratic swing of price. *Pergunnah* Palasi was sold at 280.10% of the recorded *jumma*, while *pergunnah* Rajpur, *dihi* Kalipur, the property of Sambhu Chandra Ray (step brother of the then Rajah of Nadia, and younger son of Raja Krishna Chandra) was purchased at a nominal 16.60% of the *jumma* by Tejchand Ray, the *zamindar* of Burdwan⁴⁵.

Midnapur: *Qismat pergunna'* Kassijora, *talug* Kalha sold at 53.28% of *jumma*⁴⁶; *pergunnah* Shivpur sold at 88.8% of the *jumma*⁴⁷; *pergunnah* Bhunia Muta and Tarkachaur at 173.07% of the *jumma*⁴⁸; *mouza* jotrobi in *Chakla* Jaleswar for 71.4% of the *jumma*⁴⁹; *pergunnah* Narajol at 71.5% of the *jumma*⁵⁰, and *talug* Roshi

⁴⁴Doc. no. 106 PSR XXI.

⁴⁵Doc. no. 190, 205 *Ibid*.

⁴⁶Doc. no. 39 *Ibid*.

⁴⁷Doc. no. 72- 73 *Ibid*.

⁴⁸Doc no. 53 *Ibid*.

⁴⁹Doc. no. 189 *Ibid*.

⁵⁰Doc. no. 75 *Ibid*.

and *taluk* Kolaghat in *pergunnah* Pratapbhan at 62.2% and 157.9% of the *jumma* respectively⁵¹. *Quismat pergunnah* Qutubpur however was sold at a meagre 4.3% of the *jumma*⁵².

The price- revenue ratio in this district shows a wide range from 157.89% of the *jumma* to only 4.3% of the *jumma*. It is interesting to note that lots belonging to the eminent *zamindari* of Narajol and Kasijora went to the doc on 20th March 1789 i.e. even before the deccinial settlement was put to practice in the district. In 1802 the collector of Midnapur while analysing the statistics of sale from the item of the Permanent Settlement, found that in largest *zamindaris* like Kasijora the average price of land had been little more than the *jumma*⁵³. Considering the fact that a *qismat taluk* of Kasijora fetched around 53% of the *jumma* 1789 we find that the land price had been more or less static between 1789- 1802.

Prof. Benoy Choudhuri attributes this to the “imperfectness of the land market”, where, the sale of estates or part thereof, due to default, increased, effective demand for land as a secure form of investment, was yet absent⁵⁴.

Bistwa Char (Twenty four) Pergunnah: The documents listed in the twenty four *pergunnahs* belonged to some places of modern- day Hooghly district of West

⁵¹Doc. no. 77- 79 *Ibid*.

⁵²Doc. no. 89 *Ibid*.

⁵³Parliamentary Papers 1811- 12 Vol. IX p 341. Answer by the collector of Midnapur, 24th February 1802.

⁵⁴B. B. Choudhuri, *IESHR Op. Cit* p 12.

Bengal and Jessore (Jashohar) in Bangladesh. The documents cover numerous *pergunnahs* including Shahpur, Magura, Azimabad, Mahakali, Kharpur, *qismat* Madhogarh, Hatiagarh, Kolkatta, dihiPancwan (Panchunnogram = 55 villages which were around Kolkatta) and Bharchee. Most of the property of Raja Narasingdev Ray *zamindar* of Bharchee, which was situated in *pergunnah* Hatiagarh and *pergunnah* Bharchee went on sale. The sales in this *pergunnahs* occurred in between August 1791- July 1792, when settlement of the lands with the owners was almost becoming a settled fact. The interesting feature was the high price fetched by some lots in proportion of *jumma* which perhaps showed a rising trend in the movement of land prices.

A look at the price- revenue ratio in different *pergunnahs* will strengthen this assumption.

<i>pergunnah</i> Azimabad ⁵⁵	<i>mouza</i> Sarjukhli	price 69.42% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do Huda	Ramkrishnapur	price 38.42% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do Mouza	Jaithandipur	price 69.32% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do Huda	Madhopur	price 80.87% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>pergunnah</i> Magura ⁵⁶	<i>mouza</i> Sakrigali	11.90% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do Kismat	Mouza Majhikhali	58.68% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do mouza	Srirampur (on the back of kaptaksh)	10.14% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do mouza	Kul	48.66% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do Srirampur taraf		157.45% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>Pergunnah</i> Shahpur ⁵⁷		30.3% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>Pergunnah</i> Mahakali ⁵⁸	Tarafe Kadaibadia	9.11% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>Pergunnah</i> Kharpur ⁵⁹	<i>mouza</i> Raipur	price 566.66% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>Pergunnah</i> Sakin Satgaon ⁶⁰		price 83.3% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>Pergunnah</i> Hatiagarh ⁶¹	tarafe Govindpur	price 52.6% of the <i>jumma</i>

⁵⁵ *Pergunnah* Azimabad, Doc. no. 219- 21, 243- 44, 222, 235; Ibid.

⁵⁶ *Pergunnah* Magura, Doc. no. 160- 61, 182, 185, 208- 9, 253- 5 Ibid.

⁵⁷ Doc. no. Ibid.

⁵⁸ Doc. no. 214- 16

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Do <i>tarafe</i> Gahrpur		price 103.41% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Dewanganj		price 457.25% of the <i>jumma</i>
<i>Pergunnah Bharchee</i> ⁶²	<i>Tarafe Uttarpara</i>	price 42.45% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Ramkrishnapur and Brahmanpura		price 14.72% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Bishanpur		price 29.2% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Kalikapur		price 39% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Kakori		price 35.10% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Kodalia		price 133.40% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Ranihari		price 42.02% of the <i>jumma</i>
Do <i>tarafe</i> Rajapur		price 39.02% of the <i>jumma</i>

The interesting feature of the sale in Twenty four *pergunnahs* is the simultaneous low and high rate prevailing in the district. The sales of *pergunnah* Bharchee and Hatiagarh occurred at the expense of *zamindar* Narsingdev Ray. While his lots in Bharchee fetched a general low rate (except *taraf* Kodalia) his lots in Hatiagarh fetched quite a high price. This might have reflected the indecisiveness of the purchaser, because, perhaps it was expected to be difficult to convert the lots within Bharchee into effective possession. We also know from this sale that the Uttarpara *taraf* had nothing to do with the illustrious Mukherjee family in pre- Permanent Settlement days⁶³. Their acquiring of this territory was totally a post-Permanent Settlement phenomena.

Another interesting feature was the sale of the same lot, *taraf* Srirampore, in Magura twice in between 1789 and 1792⁶⁴. While at first it fetched 102.14% of the *jumma*, later when the owner Shivchand Chakravarti defaulted it was again under the hammer fetching a higher price which was 157.45% of the *jumma*. This definitely shows the brisk opening of the nascent land market even though the investment was risky. but that did not stop it from being lucrative.

BURDWAN

Among the six documents pertaining to the district three belonged to *pergunnah* Bishanpur (Bishnupur) which was one of the oldest and virtually autonomous *zamindaris* of Bengal, dismantled during the colonial rule due to default and prostrated

⁶³N. Mukherjee: Joy Krishna Mukherjee and his times passim.

⁶⁴Doc. no. 182 and Doc. no. 253-55 PSR XXI.

legal battle among the descendants. In the letters from the Collector of Birbhum since 1789 the revenue defaults of the Raja of Bishnupur finds repeated mention⁶⁵.

The *pergunnahs*⁶⁶ sold were- Barohazari quite a fertile area in the lower part of the province at a meagre 17.67% of the *jumma*, *pergunnah* Karisunda at a high price of 191.37% of the *jumma* and *pergunnah* Muraroi (Mamula *pg* barohari) whose *jumma* was not stated. Maharajdhiraj Tejchand Bahadur, the *zamindar* of Burdwan was the purchaser of *pergunnah* Barohazari which formed nearly half of the Bishnupur *zamindari*. Hence distress sale of one *zamindari* led to the enlargement of another. Joynarayan Ghosal nephew of Gokul Ghosal *dewan* to Verelst in Chittagong (who owned Chandrokona in the orbit of Burdwan *zamindari*) however was frustrated in his attempt to take over the *Bhittorjote* mahals⁶⁷.

It thus appears that the local landed aristocrats had the intricate knowledge of the country side and hence a manipulative power over the nascent land market. This is borne out by the sale of Mandalghat *pergunnah* which was also under Maharaja Tejchand himself. The *pergunnah* had a massive *jumma* of sicca rupees 2,10,749 gondas 13 couries ²⁶⁸. It went on sale on 15th of June 1789 when it

⁶⁵ *West Bengal District Record (new series)*, Birbhum (ed.) Ashok Mitra, Letters issued 23rd March 1789 p 28; 10th Nov. 1789 p 53. and *passim*.

⁶⁶ Doc.no. 167-69, 174-76, 112 PSR XXI.

⁶⁷ Board of rev. Progs. no. 40, 2.11.1787 and no. 19 25.3.1788. Petitions of Joynarayan Ghosal. Contrary to R. Ray's contention Joynarayan Ghosal was not only a big capitalist but his family had since 1760, enormous properties in Chittagong, Sandwip, Dacca and Burdwan.

⁶⁸ Doc. no. 103 PSR XXI.

was collectively purchased by Gurudas Sen, Jagmohan Marr, Raja Ganapat Ghosh, Haracharan roy and Thakurdas Marr at the relatively low price of rupees 66,200 only, the price being a meagre 32% of the *jumma*. The same lot again was auctioned due to default on 3rd July 1791 and sold for just Rs. 5,200 i.e. only 2.47% of the *jumma*⁶⁹. Incidentally one of the former collective owners, Raja Ganapat Ray purchased the whole lot. Perhaps some underhand arrangement worked here.

Prof. Benoy Choudhury has an interesting proposition on this issue⁷⁰. Mandalghat was highly assessed but the yield was low as the production used to suffer due to regular inundation. So the Burdwan Raj allowed it to fall in arrears by withholding the payments of *qist* instalments. Whatever he acquired from the *pergunnah* was invested in buying more prosperous mahals or lots. The *pergunnah* changed hands frequently leading to a critical drop in the price in proportion to the annual revenue demand. Ratnalekha Ray has also cited this rather ingenuous way in which the Burdwan Raj sought to preserve and enlarge his *zamindari*⁷¹. Raja Tejchand made over the Burdwan *zamindari* to his mother Bishnukumari (who could not be imprisoned being a woman) and hence could defy the colonial legal proceeding to consolidate his position.

An analysis of the above sales reveals that the opening of the new land market was mostly because of the government Company's, though a newly organized

⁶⁹*Ibid.* not stated.

⁷⁰B. B. Choudhuri *Op. Cit* pp 16.

⁷¹R. Ray *Op. Cit* pp 118-19.

district administration of resident Collectors pressed much more firmly on the local tribute collecting system than the *Nizamat* could have effectively done. However, no particular territorial pattern of price trend can be established as the documents are highly randomized and there is virtually no information about eastern Bengal. The information about the comparative production of different *mahal*, put to the dock, could not be gleaned out of the sporadic data about the *pergunnahs* available to us. But we have seen that many factors, not necessarily economic, shaped the price trends.

Pre- Permanent Settlement Bengal thus saw drastic changes in the contours and dimensions of the agrarian social structure and had intrinsic influences on the institutional basis^{of} rural set up.

TABLE

Folio (a)

Doc. No.	Name of Zila/Chakla	Name of pergunnah	Price-revenue ratio (%)
205	Nadia	Rajpur	16.6
190	not mentioned	Palasi	280.20
117	not decipherred	Kolkatta (Calcutta)	could not be calculated as jumma is not decipherred
227-229	in doc. 24 pgs. mentioned	Kolikata (Calcutta)	19.89
72-73	not mentioned	Pargana Sivpur	88.87
39	Mednipur	Kisprat Kasikhowa (Kasijora)	53.28
78-79	Mednipur	Pratap bhar	62.20
24-25	Mednipur	not stated	2.99
75	Mednipur	Narajol	71.5
82	Mednipur	Pargana Khalna	94.4
89	Mednipur	Qutubpur (Kutabpur)	4.3
103,165-66	Burdwan	Mandalghat	2.47
174-76	Burdwan	Pargana (Garisend)	191.37
167-69	Burdwan	mutalika, Pargana Bishnupur	
		Pargana Barahazari	17.67
162	Burdwan (Chakla)	mutalika Pargana Bishnupur	
		Jewra	could not be calculated as jumma is not decipherred
112	Burdwan (Chakla)	Muraroj mambla pargana	could not be calculated as jumma is not decipherred
		Baro haro amla	
100	Madho= Malda	Pargana Bishnupur	106.83
106	Chakla Jehangirnagar	Taluq Gaur	61.86
		Kismat pergunnah Selimabad	

Folio (b)

Doc. No.	Name of Zila/Chakla	Name of pergunnah	Price-revenue ratio (%)
53	zila not stated	Bhunja/muta	173.075
189	Chakla Jaleswar/Mednipur	Tarkachour	
177-78	Chakla Jaleswar	-	71.40
	Muhammad Aminpur	Muzaffapur amla Pergunnah	62.20
101	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Sahapur	30.30
154-55	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	42.45
156-57	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	14.72
158-59	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	29.2
160-61	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Magma	11.9
149-50	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	39.00
145	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	35.10
146	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	32.29
138-39	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	21.50
136-37	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	42.02
142-43	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	133.40
185	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Pankora (Magma)	58.68
140-41	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	26.40
222	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Azimabad	69.32
235	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Azimabad	80.87
214-16	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Mahakali	9.11
217-18	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Kharpur	566.66

(contd.)

Folio (c)

Doc. No.	Name of Zila/Chakla	Name of pergunnah	Price-revenue ratio (%)
219-21	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Azimabad Kismat	95.25
Not stated	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Madhogarh	51.24
182	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Magma	102.14
195	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Hatiagarh	52.59
199-201	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Hatiagarh	457.25
202-03	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Hatiagarh	103.41
208-9	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Magma	48.66
211-13	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Panchanna	81.84
239-42	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Bharchi	39.02
243-44	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Azimabad	38.42
253-55	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Magma	157.45
257	Bistwachahr pergunnah	Not stated	83.33

Chapter 6

THE COMING OF THE PERMANENT SETTLEMENT

The changes in the structure and constitution of land relations and property rights in land, under the revenue experiments in Bengal, culminated in the permanent settlement.

The idea of permanently settling the land revenue obtained from the Zamindars in 1790 when the decennial settlement was concluded with the Zamindars and taluqdars, that the assessment would continue as a fixed figure, subject to approval by the Court of Directors. The approbation from the court in 1792 enabled the settlement to be declared permanent in 1793.

In looking for causal analysis of the situation which led to the permanent fixation of revenue - we need first to study the problem of net collection. In spite of the fact that the company had regularly tried to enhance the revenue, both by a steady increase in demand and applying rigidity and exactness in collection, there was

always a shortfall between the demand and actual net collection. On the other hand, rigidity in collection implied greater collection expenses.

For example, a residency was maintained in Midnapur at an expenses of more than Rs. 75,000¹. However, the net collection from the *zamindari* of Midnapur was reduced from Rs. 1,11,797. As 8, Gondas 8 to Rs. 60,00 by 1783- 84². The nearby *zamindari* of *Kassijora* also failed to yield the expected revenue.

The early colonial period, saw the marginalisation of the *zamindari* as a unit of rent management. The extent of the *zamindar*'s control was continuously curtailed by stripping the *zamindar* of his judicial and magisterial rights. On the other hand arrear in revenue also cost them lands, which they lost in default. The relentless resumption of the *lakheraj* lands by which the *zamindar* maintained his retinues, or assumed a position of patron in the local society, implied that the status of the *zamindari* as an institution was being constantly marginalized. All these also created a situation when it was vain to expect any stable atmosphere in the agrarian society.

The aftermath of the famine in fact saw a very turbulent situation in the country-side. This was evident in the "proto- jacquerie" of the Sannyasi and Fakir groups. Fakir leader Maznu Shah, interestingly, upheld the status of Rani Bhawani (who herself was in great distress because of the dismemberment of her *zamindari* for default) as against the English. The support received by Musa Shah and Pharagul Shah from the *raiyats*, symbolized the attitude of the agrarian population against

¹ *Midnapur District Records* Vol. I p 27.

² *Ibid.*

the extortionate regime³.

In the Rangpur Ding of 1783 fought against the oppression of the *izaradar* of the Company, Devisingh (whose contumacy with the local English officials was well known), the folk literature involved the age old concept of *Rajdharm* in an inverted sense⁴. *Rajar pape praja Nashto* (It is due to sins committed by the king i.e. the Company and its collaborators that the subjects are spoiled i.e. they become rebellious) so runs the proverbial line in *jager gaan*. This implied that the rebels were fighting against the changes that belied the concept of just rent.

The *zamindar* of Itabaria (Fathepur) Raja Shivchandra and Rani Jaidurga of Manthana actively supported the *ding* not only because the *izaradars* encroached upon their traditional rights of revenue, but their financial disgrace and loss of control over lands was detrimental to their social position.

In *pergunnah* Bhaluka and Tala in Raimangal under the *zamindari* of Nadia, the confrontation between the Company's officials and the *zamindar* pivoted around

³The term 'proto-jacquerie' is coined in this context by Barun de in his forward to Atish K. Dasgupta, *The Fakir and Sannyasi Uprisings*.

Though the land holding and money lending activities of the Sannyasis and the coercion by the *Fabirs* put them in albeit ambiguous relationship with the *Zaminders* as well as the tillers, it is to be noted that they had a support base among the villagers. Dasgupta has shown that they were particularly aggressive against the new *zamindars* responsible for collection of enhanced revenue for the company *Ibid* p 76.. The support that they received from the peasants is evident from *Dinajpur District Records* Vol. 1 p 161

⁴*Jager Gaan* (The song of awakening), *Rangpur Sahitya Prishad Patrika* B.Y. 1315, reprinted in Narahari Kaviraj *A Peasant Uprising in Bengal 1783* Appendix.

the question of the right of the labourer to exercise his option as a tiller or as a *malangi* (self- worker)⁵. This was at a time when part of the Maharaj's estate was threatened for default in payment of revenue, an insult the like of which never happened to the *zamindari* which was in his family for twelve generations. The *zamindar* issued a *parwanah* ordering the *naibs* of the said *pergunnah* not to allow his subjects to work in the Company's salt *Khalaries*. Interestingly, the recruiting season for the *malangis* clashed with the harvesting time of the main crop aman rice (December- January). For the *zamindar*, paucity of man power might lead to delay in harvesting and consequent delay in paying the revenue *qist*, thus running the risk of dismemberment of the *zamindari* on default. On the other hand, if skilled *malangis* are not allowed to migrate, clandestine production of salt could be organised. The *zamindar* never considered it illegal to rent his own lands to his own subjects for private *Khalaries*. At the same time the traditional ethos of the rural society made him sympathise with his subjects, who, if forced to migrate to the *Sundarban* for the Company's manufacture would live and die like captive animals in jungles.

For the *raiya*s, the *zamindar's* *parwana* served as a legitimate sanction for *protest*. The result was sporadic out burst, when Company's officials sought to force a *dadān* (advance) and indent them for work. The Company's salt as well as the *dadān* money was looted and the *Wadedar* (Supervisor) abducted and beaten

⁵For a detail study of the incident, see the author's article "Resistance against the agency system of self production in Raimangal 1789" *IHCP Delhi* 1991- 92.

up.

When the English officials arrested the *naib* on charges of instigation, there was a pitched battle and troops had to be called. Apparently this incident looked like a mere case of arson. But this amply proved that dual role of the Company as the highest authority in revenue collection and as the monopolistic investor, led to a destabilizing effect on the country side.

'Social banditry' was a phenomenon amply noticed in this chaotic conditions⁶. On one hand, *raiyats* had been forced by the consequences of the famine to indulge in robbery as a means of subsistence⁷. On the other hand, there existed definite links between the *zamindars* and the bandits⁸. The *zamindar* of Baikunthapur gave countenance to dacoits for which the committee of circuit in Rungpur recommended his dispossession in 1772⁹. Even in 1779 the *sezwal* of the Company Kishan Kinkar Das was intimated of murderous assault by this *zamindar*, as he was to investigate the affairs of his *zamindari*. Similarly, it was reported from Jessore that Srikant Ray, *zamindar* of Yusufpur was in league with the robbers, as abettor and protector

⁶Ranjit Sen *Social Banditry in Bengal* passim.

⁷CCRM progs. Vol. 5 p 63. Letter recieved from Supervisor of Natore, 19th April 1771.

⁸*e.g.* the loot of the factory at Malda (Jagganathpur) in 1785 or in the salt factory of Midnapur in 1790, *Dinajpur District Records* Vol. 1 p 14. Letter received from Charles Grant dt. 20th March 1786.

⁹CCRM Progs. 23rd December 1772.

of depredations¹⁰. The salient feature of the rural scenario thus was one of utter lawlessness, and this was as common in Lakhipur or Bakharganj in East as well as Birbhum in West, to Rungpur in North and Midnapur in South.

The *zamindars* indulgence in this sort of criminal activities can be explained as their desperate attempt to cope with the twin pressure of enhancement and rigidity in collection, coupled with curtailment of their perquisites and scopes of patronage distribution. All these affected their social standing.

For the Company, the situation presented manifold problems. There was as we have already said, a fall in net collection in spite of enhancement and rigidity. The collection expenditures and maintenance of peace led to expenditures which were eating up their profits. It was under this context that the new experimentations in revenue fixation was carried out.

Once the Company had decided to stand forth as the Dewan, it was duely stressed that the revenue was beyond doubt the object of the Government: "that on which all the rest depend and to which all the rest depend and to which every other should be made subservient"¹¹.

By 1777 some of the members of the Governor General in Council, like Francis and Clavering, objected to the practice of ensuring an intermediate security, the *maljamine*. They were thought to be "an additional burdain to the country

¹⁰LCB Vol. II p 7. Supervisor of Jessore to Resident at Durbar 29th August 1770. CCRM Progs. 23rd January 1772, Enclosure *Arzee* of Prankrishna Ray.

¹¹Progs. Committee of Circuits at Kissimbazar, 28th July 1772.

and contrived for no other purpose than to dispossess the *raiyat*, by degree of their property"¹². These members gave a simple logic, that "land itself is the natural and proper security for the government". Hence, sale of land must answer ultimately for non payment of rent¹³.

At the same time they supposed that the rents should be such as the lands could justly pay. As against farming out the land to the highest bidders, they thought that "the land should be restored to the *zamindar* whose unalienable property they are, upon a reasonable *jumma*"¹⁴. They were convinced that "immoderate and unreasonable demands not only create the necessity of future remissions, but furnish the land holder with pretence of paying less than he ought"¹⁵.

Hence their solution was to take an average of the net collections of the last three or five years and fix the net *jumma* of the present year (1777) at that amount. To Francis and Clavering, the *jumma* of 1776 was arbitrary and unreasonable as it was the highest of the last five years¹⁶.

The Governor General Hastings had a vague formula of a "rent adequate to the value of lands". This however, left unspecified, the proportion of the net produce

¹²BOR Progs. dt. 16th July 1777. Enclosure no. 4.

¹³*Ibid.*

¹⁴*Ibid.*

¹⁵*Ibid.*

¹⁶*Ibid.*

to be kept for the support of the proprietors¹⁷.

The *zamindars* were either dispossessed or forced to engage at ruinous terms by the revenue experiments under Hastings. Already in 1775, Hastings had issued a circular letter to the members of the Provincial Councils of Revenue, inviting their respective opinions as to the effects of the farming system. All of them replied that it caused total devastation¹⁸.

The farming system, famine and dearth, and also an acute silver crisis; (which implied marketing problem for agricultural products and hence had its obvious impact on reducing the payment of cash rent) all these contributed to the rising embarrassments of the *zamindars*. Being responsible to the Company Government for a tax equal to nine-tenth of the expected rents of their estates, they were hardly left with any surplus to compensate accidents¹⁹.

The Court of Director, on 12th April 1786, sent a directive that laid down the guiding principles of a durable and permanent system of revenue administration, abandoning the policy of arbitrary increases of revenue²⁰. But it also emphasized that though the future assessment should be moderate and fixed, no plea should be allowed for abatements and remissions²¹. The idea of Philip Francis was thus tried

¹⁷*Ibid.*

¹⁸IOP, HMS Vol. 206 folios 147- 207.

¹⁹Sirajul Islam, *The Permanent Settlement in Bengal: A study of its operation 1790- 1819*, p 12.

²⁰COD's letter to G. G. in Council, 12th April 1786.

²¹*Ibid.*

to be given a proper shape after another decade of experiments.

With these experimentations, the concepts about the landed property embedded in the term *zamindari* also under certain refinement. The *zamindari* was first seen as a conditional office, annually renewable and revocable on defalcation. Grant maintained that "Sovereign ruler through out Hindoostan is the sole virtual proprietor of the soil, in right and fact the real acting landlord²². Hence the sovereign^e (i.e. the Company) can assess revenue as per as its wish. In contrast Shore argued that "the sovereign's right" is to be restricted "to a proportion of the revenues of all lands, not alienated by his sanction from the rental of the government" : a principle which rendered the property right in land to be dependent on the equity and moderation of the governing power²³. Shore also thought that the Company's government by limiting its demands to a precise amount "will leave to its subject a competence which due care and economy may convert into affluence²⁴. However Shore wanted that the new principle should be introduced by degrees rather than establishing it at once which was what Cornwallis intended²⁵.

²²Grant, Analysis in Firminger (ed.) *Op. Cit* Vol II p 93.

²³*Ibid.* Appendix, Minute of Jhon Shore, 2nd April 1788. Cf. *Ray rayan's* answers to questions from Jhon Shore on the position and rights of *zamindars* (in Persian), BM. Additional Mss. 6586, folio no. 104/106 to 110/112.

²⁴*Ibid.*

²⁵*Ibid.*

The ideas behind permanently settling the revenue of Bengal, had undergone a refreshing scrutiny in the monograph of Ranjit Guha²⁶. Guha saw in the deliberations on the revenue experiments of the Company, the reflection of the conflicting notions of landed right that were shaping in Europe. That the Company's officials had been influenced by the current economic thought in Europe can hardly be doubted. But to look at the Permanent Settlement as a product mainly of theoretical developments would be a rather myopic inference. Rather, the new ideological trends were absorbed by the colonial officials, because the 'foot fitted the shoe', i.e. a system of private property seemed *prima facie* to be convenient for the Company's objective and interest. In his minute of 3rd February 1790, Cornwallis had frankly defined these objectives and interest as follows.

"We have by a train of most fortunate events obtained the dominion of one of the most fertile countries on the face of the globe, with a population of mild and industrious inhabitants, perhaps equal to, if not exceeding in number, that of all other British possessions put together

Its real value to Britain depends upon the continuance of its ability to furnish a large annual investment to Europe, to give considerable assistance to the treasury at Canton, and to supply pressing and extensive wants of the country."²⁷

The main aim of the Permanent Settlement was therefore to maximise as well as stabilize the revenue income from the province. The colonial statesman understood that this sort of settlement could secure an extra revenue for the Company in lieu of

²⁶Ranjit Guha, *Op. Cit* passim.

²⁷G. G. in Council Progs. 7th January 1790.

grant of private property, which could now be fixed at a fairly high level.

Cornwallis' settlement struck a demand on the average collection of past three years, with some necessary changes, which for all practical purposes meant the demand of 1196 B.Y. i.e. 1789- 90, the highest the country was ever forced to give.

Along with this, the system of monthly sale of defaulter's estates immediately before and after the settlement, implied that there was no question of moderating the ferocity of the collection at the level of assessment now established.

The rules and stipulations laid for the land holders implicitly suggest that the main driving force behind this regulation was the desire to maximise the income from land. This is indicated in the salient principles of the settlement viz.,

Payment of revenue shall not be withheld or delayed on account of any circumstance at all, including natural calamities. No part of the land included in the settlement could be appropriated for religious charitable or other uses whereby became exempt from public finances. Lands actually held exempt from public revenue i.e. any denomination of *lakheraj* were now to be assessed as *malguzari*²⁸.

On the face of it, it may seem that fixing the revenue permanently would imply that smooth collection rather than maximization was the ulterior motive. For, the settlement negated the earlier trends in Company's revenue experiments, like periodic augmentation of the tax demands and uncertainty of the Company regarding revenue collecting agents.

²⁸Harington, Analysis of Laws and Regulations pp 251- 258, cited by Islam, *Op. Cit* p 13.

It appears that till 1770, the main problem was to make regular collection, and the absence of local knowledge generated suspicion, of faithlessness on the part of the traditional local revenue agents.

The coercion remained, oblivious of the conditions of production, as was shown during and after the famine. The Company systematically did away with the native revenue servicemen at the level of superior management as exemplified in the dismissal of Reza Khan. But at the local level they could not put new men. Nor could they do away with the perquisites of the local revenue collecting bureaucracy for the fear of drop in collection²⁹. It was these men as well as some new people who joined their position as collaborators and confidants of the Company's servants who started speculating in revenue farming. One of the major objects of the Permanent Settlement, was obviously to free revenue collection from any adverse effect of speculation, that had so far dogged the effort to maximise collection through auction of revenue rights.

In 1777, the Collector were advised to settle either with old *zamindars* or with a people from the locality³⁰. If this policy was couched in the rhetoric of inducing a private property in land among its rightful owners, the basic aim was to stabilize collection, through people who had intricate knowledge about the topography, production as also methods of rent collection.

If Francis had anticipated the formulation of the Permanent Settlement, he

²⁹see Chapter III

³⁰*Midnapur District Record New Series* p 7, 11.

probably saw in it not a duplication of English land ownership, but a satisfactory system of collection. Cornwallis envisaged that the settlement would entice landowners to improve land, as a fixity in the revenue demand would make it lucrative for the *zamindars* to enlarge the productivity capacity of their land.

The exact Permanent Settlement plan differed from Francis', ideas in more respect than one. Francis was vocal for a moderate assessment adjusting the demands to the actual needs of the time. But Cornwallis' settlement was subject to the intense pressure to increase revenue which heralded the ruin of the old *zamindars*. The dismemberment of the *zamindari* of Birbhum, Nadia, Bishnupur, Rajshahi, Bharchee (Jessore) and Dinajpur was the immediate result of such a burdensome settlement.

Most of the lots of the dismembered *zamindaris* were bought by the old *zamindari* service gentry or the new colonial native service gentry. For the first group establishing their position as *zamindars* was not difficult. That the latter could also effectively entrench themselves in the rural set up showed that the British regime was breaking down localism in its own interest³¹. It of course, helped the outsiders that they had been involved with land management for years, and they unlike the old *zamindars* had practical knowledge about the property they bought or owned³².

³¹This goes against the consistent revisionist postulates that British rule could not decisively impinge and transform the existing agrarian social structure as it lacked the intrinsic potentialities. The pioneering argument was from R. E. Fryckenberg *Guntur District 1788- 1848., A history of local influence and central authority.*

³²eg. Ganga Givind Singh the founder of the Kandi *zamindari* was well versed in land laws and

But if this phenomenon is seen as a mere continuity of the old order because old men and old status oriented land right continued, we would tend to ignore both qualitative and quantitative changes that had occurred in the colonial period³³.

The dismemberment of the old *zamindaris* certainly variegated the composition of the landed society. But it was limited change, because only few dozen more families who were connected with land management or Company's revenue administration came to the fore front³⁴.

The parcellized sales of estates and the lust for land by new purchasers, their tendency to manipulate the sales in a way that they could get rid of unprofitable *mahals* and buy lucrative ones at low prices, brought into being new elements in the ranks of *zamindars*, more concerned to look at land as an investment yielding them increasing returns.

Naturally the homogeneity of the old type of *zamindaris* was lost. Most of the new *zamindars* had scattered estates because they bought in parcels as opportunity arose³⁵. This created the ground for absenteeism in later years.

Dewan to the Committee of Revenue 1772. Though his family fortune came from the money lending business in silk he speculated in land as guardian of the minor Raja of Dinajpur. Similarly Gokul Ghosal founder of the Bhukailash estate, started as Dewan of the salt department of Chittagong but acquired land rights in Sandwip while helping the survey of Chittagong lands. Cited by B. B. Choudhury in *CEHI* Vol. II, pp 111- 112.

³³For the Continuity thesis see Ratnalekha Ray *Op. Cit*

³⁴Sirajul Islam *Op. Cit* p 254.

³⁵*Ibid.* Appendix IV to XIV. The estates purchased by Kandi family of Murshidabad, Banerjees of Telenipara, Narail family of Jessore, Manik family of Dinajpur, Abhoy Charan Dutt of Calcutta,

Another important change that came in land relations as a result of colonial revenue settlements was a change in the character of right in land. Land right which was previously in local legal parlance a *sthabar* property, (*sthabar* literally means residual i.e. immovable) due to hereditary control now gradually became *asthabar* (i.e. movable) as and when the owner failed to pay the revenue in time. Revenue right in land also became a collateral for accumulated debt³⁶.

The Company's revenue experiments thus brought a structural change in the contours of landed property and land management. The changes occurred as a direct result of the colonial reshaping of the rural order of Bengal. The period 1765- 1792 represented its crucial formative phase.

Tagores (senior branch), Palchoudhurs of Ranaghat, Danishmand family of Murshidabad Holders of Noapara and Dwarakanath Babu of Singpur.

³⁶ *Surul Nathi sangraha* Viswabharati Mss. Doc. no. 78 folio 1, *Karyapatra* dt. 2nd *Jaishtha* 1204 B.Y. (i.e May 1793). The *am* of Birbhum Muhammad Zaman Khan gives *Huda* Krishnagar, *Huda* Serandi, *Huda* Manoharpur and *Huda* Sansat in *pergunnah* Barabaksingha to Ramnarayan Sarkar of Surul against sicca Rs. 10836 As 14 Gonda 18 in cash which was to pay for getting *pergunnah* Bhrukunda out of mortgage from Ramnidhi Mitra of Calcutta. Incidentally the *jumma* of the lots in Barabaksingha is Rs. 5418 As. 7 Gonda 9. The mortgage price- revenue ratio being two hundred percent.

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